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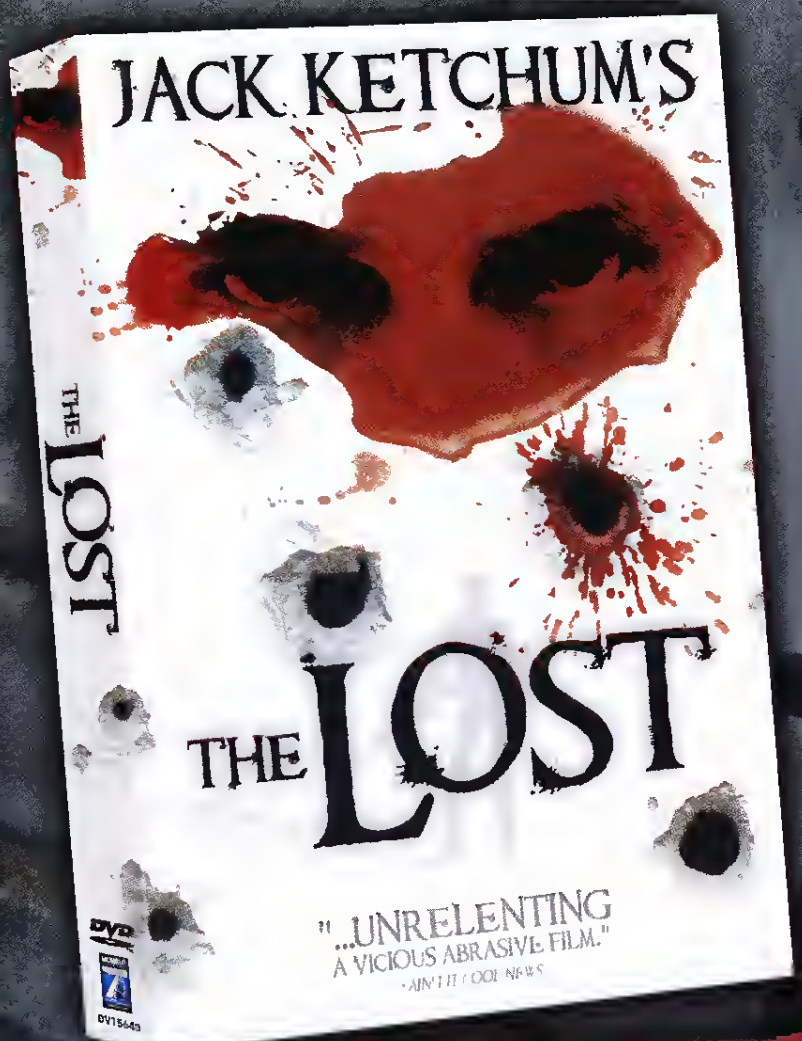
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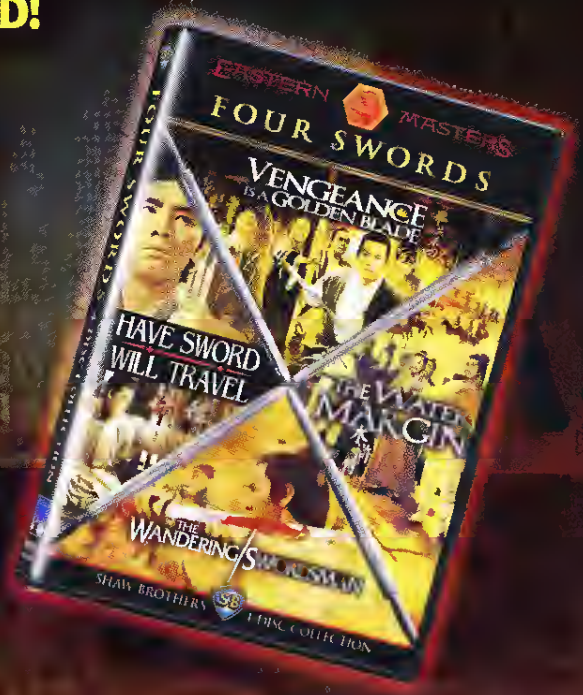
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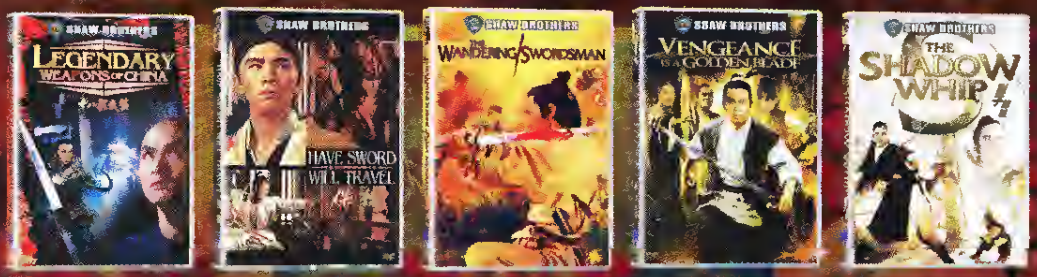


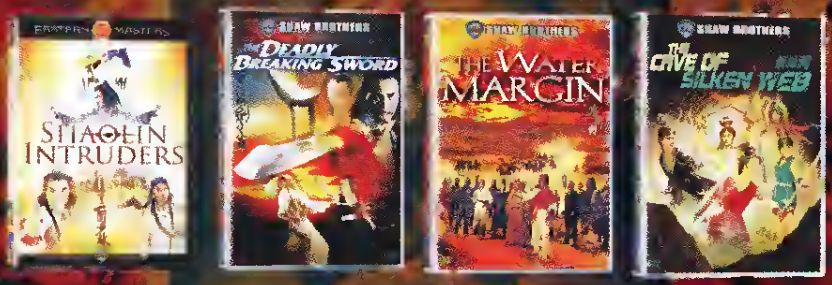
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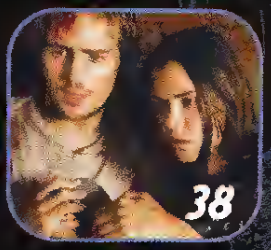
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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

Note From Underground



I once asked George Romero where he got the idea for *Night of the Living Dead*. "I stole it – from Richard Matheson," he replied with a laugh, obviously referring to Matheson's landmark 1954 sci-fi/horror novel *I Am Legend*. I love Romero's honesty, though, because it illustrates something significant about the genre: there's a huge difference between homage (or inspiration) and outright theft.

Sometimes it's difficult to argue whether something has been borrowed or stolen because there are all sorts of nebulous factors involved. For example, buying the rights to something and bastardizing it isn't considered theft because those creative rights were purchased from the author. Despite the rage and contempt I felt after seeing *I Am Legend* (see review on p.38), irresponsible, disrespectful and inexcusable dreck like that gets away with its crimes because, hey, someone bought the rights to the story. They *own* it, technically. The phrase "pearls before swine" comes to mind.

Even tougher to condemn are the "homages." *House of 1000 Corpses* is, in essence, a melange of ideas taken from several films, most notably *TCM 2*, right down to the dinner table scene, but in the end, it can be argued that it is its own movie. *Event Horizon* cribbed significantly from *The Haunting*, but it's set in space, so it too is its own movie. Similarly, I liked *28 Days Later* when I saw it the first time when it was called *Day of the Dead*, but everyone else seemed to think it was a pretty fresh story. And let's not forget Quentin Tarantino, who's made a career as a collage artist by "borrowing" heavily from other films, but again, the result is always its own unique entity.

In other cases, however, it comes down to genuine robbery, where an idea has been stolen by self-aggrandizing individuals who go on to take credit for the originator's work. I've personally seen shows ripped away from their makers, scripts taken away from writers, films yanked from directors, designs seized from illustrators and FX appropriated from artists. The worst type of theft is creators stealing from creators, specifically classic stories that serve as a type of free-for-all well of ideas that everyone, maybe even Romero included, feels okay drawing liberally from.

Has integrity become an extinct ethical principle in the entertainment industry? Not entirely, of course, but when I see someone blatantly abducting an idea from a lesser-known writer or filmmaker and presenting it to the mainstream as their own, it really upsets me (as was the case with a recent promotional trailer for a big-budget franchise that flagrantly robbed an independent film that was made in 1994, the impetus for the rant of this editorial.)

More shocking, is that writers themselves sometimes contribute to the problem. The often unpredictable, often abrasive, often acid-tongued, yet always razor sharp-witted master storyteller Harlan Ellison once pointed this out in his controversial resignation speech from the SFWA back in 1982. Ellison chastised his peers for allowing themselves to be raped by the film and television industry.

"Out there on the coast, there are an infinite number of clowns who have come out of mailrooms and out of advertising agencies directly into ownership of studios and these people like to steal properties. " he said, before telling his peers about being asked to write a rip-off of Walter Tevis' *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, which he declined because, "as an ethical writer," he refused to rip off his friends. He then called out his fellow members for doing just that and went on to say, "I no longer feel that I can be part of an organization that has a death wish this strong. Therefore, I am resigning from the SFWA. Don't call me anymore, because I ain't your Hollywood liaison anymore."

Though Ellison has a reputation for saying bombastic things, there was a nobility is his drastic accusations, which he formed by observing unethical actions from *within* an organization of professional writers. He was refusing to ignore the problem. Of course, his speech is dated, as all kinds of intellectual property laws designed to protect writers have since emerged but, unfortunately, bad contracts, hidden clauses and other legal shenanigans still make it difficult for some writers to have consistent and complete ownership of their creative properties (at least according to the ones who have confided in me).

This state of affairs is frustrating because there's no real solution to the problem. People will just keep borrowing and stealing valuable ideas from one another – in some cases with positive results (improving upon it or making it their own, as I outlined above) and in others, merely chewing up and regurgitating a damn good story (such as *I Am Legend*) into a stinking pool of lumpy vomit that insults the source material and seemingly exists only to piss people like me and Harlan Ellison off.

Jovanka

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COVER MULBERRY STREET
DESIGN BY GARY PULLIN

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

DEAR JOVANKA, I just read the "Note From Underground" in *RM#75* and I am in awe. I have had a severe crush on *Galaxy of Terror* for years, and to see you devote your entire editorial to it simply sent my dark heart aflutter. To know that someone else out there can appreciate maggot rapists truly gives one hope for the world. I have long been in love with *Rue Morgue* and now I can officially say I am in love with you, Jovanka! Will you marry me? I'll build a space pyramid to hold the service in, and perhaps The Master could do the honours? Pretty please?

Ryan Lieske – Grand Rapids, Michigan

I JUST WANTED to thank everyone at *Rue Morgue* for the published award in *RM#75* – Goriest Scene for Billy Kitka's beheading in *30 Days Of Night*. I just picked up the magazine today and I was overjoyed. I mean anyone can win Best Film – in a way it's so subjective. I am proud to win Goriest Scene, there's something tangible about it. We set out to film the most convincing beheading on film, and you honour us with your praise. It's funny, as that scene was never meant to go that dark... it's a long story. Once more, my sincerest thanks, from me and everyone who worked on the scene. Bless you.

David Slade – Director, *30 Days of Night*

I GENERALLY ENJOY your publication, as it reaches into areas not covered elsewhere, but I also feel pushing a movie like *The Girl Next Door* is going to land you in a very special place in Hell reserved for bottom-feeders like Jack Ketchum. Be honest, the movie serves only one purpose and that is to titillate a viewer who gets off on forced sex, pedophilia and other people's suffering. It has no place in a magazine like *Rue Morgue*. I understand that horror has many faces but you should file this one under "snuff porn." PS. I'm sure you won't print this, as all the letters you print are from people pissing themselves about how much they love your mag.

Chris McKeever – Northampton, Massachusetts

WHEN I HEARD they were making a film out of Jack Ketchum's *The Girl Next Door*, my first question was "Why?" This is the first time I ever had to tear the cover off of an issue of *Rue Morgue* and throw it away because it became too disturbing to look upon. I actually read the article just to give the filmmakers a chance to explain their decisions. Just thinking about the film began to leave me feeling very disturbed and outraged. I have heard that this film is more explicit than the crimes it is based upon since the girl wasn't raped in real life and died a virgin. Perhaps in the book Ketchum took liberties with the facts, as real life is often embellished to make it more "entertaining." (I do not plan on reading the book, either, since *Rue Morgue* succinctly summed up its plot in a previous issue.) The only positive thing that I saw in the article was that the house that these horrors took place in was turned into a women's shelter. I apologize for disrespecting your magazine by throwing it away, but it was just too disturbing to me.

Matt Fratto – Las Vegas, Nevada

IT WAS SURPRISING and perhaps a little flattering to read Daniel Farrands supposedly quote me (in *RM#74*) regarding his screenplay for *The Girl Next Door*. I do recall being sent the screenplay by a financier named Michael Mendelsohn seven or eight years ago to see if I would be interested. I also recall telling said financier that I saw no commercial value in the story. I don't recall telling Farrands anything. Perhaps I did. While the true life story is certainly attention-grabbing in the same way a small dog leaving diarrhea on a lamppost is, there is really no point to depicting either. I remain glad that I somehow inspired Mr. Farrands to spend eight years fighting, no doubt for virtually no pay, to bring his world of depravity to the rental bins. At least during that time he doesn't seem to have inflicted any other doggie diarrhea on the world.

Don Murphy – address withheld

I PICKED UP the recent issue with the feature on Doyle of the Misfits. I was surprisingly grateful for the questions Keith Carman asked. We can nearly all agree the (classic) Misfits are extremely influential to many musical subgenres and Doyle's perspective was enlightening. I'm sure we all wondered how he and his brother could discontinue working together and he could subsequently return to Glenn's side. It was quite captivating to read. I'll have to keep the issue on hand for future Misfits debates.

Hannah Verbeuren – Cleveland, Ohio

GARY PULLIN and Justin Erickson kill me every month with their amazing design skills. I love the layout of each and every issue. From front to back, not only is this magazine a great read, but it's a visual treat. I just wanted to say, as a designer hopeful myself, I truly respect *Rue*'s ability to create a beautiful magazine. Teach me your ways, oh wise and all-knowing Ghoulish Gary!

Gary Meacher – Cleveland, Ohio

THANK YOU for the great job you do at *Rue Morgue* in Canada. There are so many talented people of Canadian persuasion (John Candy was the greatest though) in heaven now praying for us all! Please contact that woman Bianca Beauchamp [featured in an advertisement] for me, ask her to write me a letter of her thoughts, critical or not! I have no computer but I would like her to autograph that photo of her in your mag. She looks okay. By the way, please don't ever take an ad like that again, it cheapens the magazine. People like her may be truly evil, only God knows. But there is good and bad in all of us! Tracy Ryan, Elisha Cuthbert are two Canadians you could feature in your magazine, they have awesome lips. Jovanka, I collect autographs. Please ask the woman in the ad to sign one, and I'd like you to sign [one], and any attractive woman you have working at your magazine. Do you have any printing plates of any covers of your magazine? I'd love to have one for my collection, autographed or not. Please add a lipstick print, ask the women to sign next to their print, and of course try to get Bianca also. When you contact her, please tell her to consider another line of work. She has no respect for herself! Do you know any fart jokes you could write down? Jovanka, thank you always and peace, hope, love and joy to all people.

Ken Lynch – Melbourne, Florida

[Wow. Just... wow – Ed.]

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to info@rue-morgue.com or:

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Dreadlines

News Highlights Horror Happenings

Screenwriting duo scares up new Argento and Carpenter films

This past January's announcement in the trades that screenwriters Sean Keller and Jim Agnew had sold scripts to be filmed by Dario Argento and John Carpenter, respectively, was a huge moment for any horror fan dreaming of one day making it big in the movie business.

"It's unreal," says Keller. "You try to write the movie you want to see. You try to write something that someone else would want to see, as well. When John Carpenter and Dario Argento say, 'I like what you're doing,' it's tremendously validating."

This is especially true when, like Keller and Agnew, you've spent years trying to make it in Hollywood with little success. Both were struggling musicians before separately "catching the movie bug," as Agnew puts it, Keller tried his hand at acting while Agnew produced; they finally met while working at the same Hollywood bar. Says Agnew, "We had the same fetishistic taste in music and films, and hit it off right away."

Late-night bitching about the state of Hollywood led to brainstorming their own "big ideas for movies," says Keller. The first was *L.A. Gothic*.

"This was an idea I had rolling around in my head for ten years before Sean and I sat down to write it," explains Agnew. "It came from years and years of playing around Hollywood in a bunch of bands and staring out at the audiences full of drunken train-wreck individuals. It sort of occurred to me that they could all be zombies... or vampires."

Thus *L.A. Gothic* was born, a horror anthology that Keller describes as having "a *Pulp Fiction* timeline and a Hollywood vibe." The official synopsis describes it as five interwoven stories of high-octane horror focusing on a vengeful ex-priest's efforts to protect his teenage daughter from the supernatural evils of LA's dark side.

"The screenplay is a love letter to the history of horror cinema," says Keller. "It has references to dozens of other works, but once Dr. Carpenter was attached, the job was to make this script a John Carpenter movie, which was probably what we should have been doing all along because it got stronger and tighter and just plain better once we started to think like him."



*Sean Keller and Jim Agnew, writers of **L.A. Gothic** and **Giallo***

"He taught us a thing or two about story and character," adds Agnew.

As for the Argento project, titled *Giallo*, Agnew says it's about a woman – who teams up with a detective with "issues" – searching for her sister, who has been kidnapped by a serial killer. "It sort of became a crusade to make a cool giallo thriller that hit all the right notes but would also appeal to a more American sensibility."

Keller elaborates, "We're always looking for something fun and fresh to do. So one day, as we sat around thinking, 'what's missing in horror these days?' Jim just spouted out, 'Italian horror... a giallo. And we'll call it *Yellow* [the subgenre was named for the yellow covers of the pulp novels that inspired it].'"

Strangely, after US producers passed on the Americanized project, Agnew's Croatian neighbour, Rafael Primorac, took up the cause. He took the script to Hannibal Films, which got an Italian television director attached, who later bowed out.

"That's when Rafael said, 'Let's just send it to Dario Argento!' And he actually liked it!" says Agnew.

Argento's daughter Asia has been cast as the woman searching for her sister; Ray Liotta is the cop and Vincent Gallo was set to play the killer (as of press time Gallo had reportedly left the project). Filming begins in Torino, Italy in March, and the Weinstein Company has already acquired distribution rights for the U.S. The final script, Agnew promises, contains all manner of giallo trademarks, including a black-gloved killer, an opera house and fashion models.

"Cats, jazz, flashbacks," says Keller. "If you want more details, you're going to have to buy a ticket."

Sean Plummer



Director Bruce LaBruce expands gay art-porn canon to include zombies

Since unleashing his outrageous debut *No Skin Off My Ass* in '91 and with successive art-porn assaults such as *Hustler White* (1996) and *The Raspberry Reich* (2004) in his filmography, Bruce LaBruce has gained international notoriety as the enfant terrible of Canadian gay cinema – a reputation that now encompasses horror, with his latest: *Otto, or, Up with Dead People*.

The awkwardly punctuated title (a nod to Herman Melville's 1852 novel *Pierre, or, the Ambiguities*) refers to the two films within the film. The first one, "Otto," is a documentary about a boy who may or may not be a zombie. The second, "Up with Dead People," is a political zombie porno flick. Both films are directed by an avant-garde lesbian filmmaker character named Medea Yarn (an anagram for legendary experimental filmmaker Maya Deren, 1917-61).

"My inspirations were movies like *Night Tide* [Curtis Harrington, 1961], *Carnival of Souls* [Herk Harvey, 1962] and George Romero's vampire film *Martin* [1977]," explains LaBruce. "They're all basically movies about monsters or monstrous characters who may or may not be what they appear to be. But that's part of the whole fun of the movie. Even when I was making it, people on the crew were always asking me, 'Well, is Otto a zombie or isn't he?' And I would always leave it open to interpretation."

Un-death is only the beginning of Otto's identity crisis, however, as he's also a zombie with an eating disorder. As a vegetarian in a previous life, he abhors consuming human flesh. Instead, he sustains himself on a predominantly roadkill diet. As an effeminate, vegetarian, gay zombie, Otto is particularly vulnerable to his human enemies, so in order to stay under the radar, he auditions for a role in Up with Dead People in the hopes that people won't think he's a genuine zombie, they'll just think he's playing one.

A lifelong Romero aficionado – *Dawn of the Dead* is his all-time favourite movie – LaBruce exploits the zombie subgenre not merely as a convenient metaphor to comment on contemporary consumerism but to tackle issues very specific to contemporary gay culture.



Otto: or, Up with Dead People: *Jey Crisfar as a gay zombie with an eating disorder*

"The old horror monsters like vampires and werewolves, they're more like individuals," he explains. "They're on the fringe of society. They're marginalized characters. But zombies are like the ultimate conformist. They come in masses and they're the ultimate consumers. Part of the thesis of the movie is that gays are now model consumers. Gay culture has become extremely conformist, gays are getting married and having children and they're very upwardly mobile and bourgeois. But the zombie template fits AIDS as well because AIDS is viral. It's the idea of the body decaying, and I'm shifting the paradigm so my zombie is the outsider, and, just as in *Night of the Living Dead*, where the rednecks are beating and burning the zombies, that's essentially what has happened to homosexuals as well."

LaBruce is confident that his traditional audience will accept his foray into horror, firmly convinced that "gays are very much into blood and guts." But it's the mainstream horror fans he's more worried about.

"They're able to watch the most extreme torture porn and decapitation and disembowelments, but then if they see two men kissing they'll puke," he says with a laugh. "That's what I'm expecting. One of my initial impetuses was I thought it would be really cool to make a zombie porn movie, partly because zombies are so rotten that you can just make your own orifice so it's perfect for pornography."

Otto, or, Up with Dead People premiered in January at the Sundance Film Festival and is currently touring international film festivals. For more info, visit ottothezombie.com.

Stuart Andrews



Dreadlines

ROADKILL

FROM THE INFO HIGHWAY

grandguignol.com
Curious about Grand Guignol? Well, look no further than this website by Thrillpeddlers, a San Francisco theatre company that translates and recreates the old macabre Parisian stage shows. It also houses a list of plays, a collection of antique promo posters, an archive of books and articles that examine the movement's history.

midnitemoviesdvd.com
MGM recently launched this site for their Midnight Movies line. It not only catalogues the dozens of (mostly) double features in the series, it also offers trailers, movie trivia and some spankin' retro drive-in design.

michaelknost.com
Meet Noctem Aetemus, a new PDF horror mag that specializes in horror fiction – the first issue contains tales by Ramsey Campbell, Cherie Priest and Michael Laimo – but also includes interviews, reviews, an art feature and regular columns on the state of the genre. Crack that imaginary spine today!

sumateum.org/English
Sumateum, a.k.a. the Museum of Supernatural History, is an online depository of "authentic magical artefacts and strange stories gathered from around the world." Whether you're a believer or a skeptic, the historical and personal accounts of various relics make for an undeniably fascinating read.

darkromance.com
If MySpace is too mainstream for you, Dark Romance provides an alternative aimed at those who identify as goth or simply embrace dark culture and art. It features everything you'd expect from a social networking site, plus celebrity interviews, reviews, macabre artwork and writings, and even a web store for your gloomy needs.



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Compiled by Monica S. Kuebler
Got a Roadkill suggestion?
Email a link to: **roadkill@rue-morgue.com**

Toronto improv troupe returns for another season of horror-comedy

Madness, mayhem and the macabre return to the stage of Toronto's Bad Dog Theatre on March 1, when improv comedy revue *The Late Late Horror Show* begins its fourth season of late-night lunacy and terror.

The high-energy weekly production is a live spoof "horror movie" complete with severed limbs and copious amounts of stage blood.

A group of regular performers spontaneously improvises a 90-minute show from two elements, picked by the audience from two hats at the beginning of the evening: a monster and a location. The actors devise lengthy lists of creatures and venues prior to the show (after discovering that taking suggestions from the audience, although fun, did tend to result in an overwhelming number of vampire and zombie stories). Past titles include "The Desert of the Sirens," "The Vultures of the MGM Grand," and, perhaps most surreally, "The Orchard of the Q-Berts." The whole thing is the brainchild of two-time Canadian Comedy Award nominee and self-professed "huge horror geek," Sean Browning.

"Horror is one area of comedy where you can have a lot of fun," he says. "I mean, if you look at old [Monty] Python and stuff like that, there was a lot of sick stuff in there. . . The dark sort of lends itself well to comedy."

In the world of improv, horror usually only takes centre stage in Halloween specials, such as Toronto performer Sean Tabares' zombie comedy *Turned!* and in the shows of troupes such as Seattle's Blood Squad. *The Late Late Horror Show* stands out as it takes its inspiration from a grand tradition of B-movies, including the works of Roger Corman, and also newer comedies such as *Black Sheep*, *Dead and Breakfast* and *Severance*. The show has also morphed over the years, from a Friday night midnight movie-esque experience (complete with free popcorn) to the current, more structured production influenced by *Tales from the Crypt*, with one of the group directing the show from the sidelines, rather like the Crypt Keeper – or "Gate Crasher," as he's been known in past performances.



*A **Grindhouse**-inspired poster for an upcoming show*

Browning, who has also been teaching improv at the Bad Dog Theatre for five years, says that horror and comedy go so well together because they're both inherently subversive genres.

"We go from Roger Corman to Harvey Korman pretty quickly. But that's sort of the fun of it," he explains. "And I think horror should be fun. The horror movies that seem to really stick in people's minds are the ones that have a certain amount of fun to them."

Buckets of gore, naturally, are a big part of that. "We do get bloody, I particularly like to get bloody, and there's a few others in the cast that love to get back there and get as much blood on them as possible."

The show plays Saturday nights from March 1 through the summer and fall at 11:30 p.m. at the Bad Dog Theatre, 138 Danforth Avenue, Toronto. For more information, go to baddogtheatre.com.

Justine Warwick



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THE CORONER'S REPORT 13

Weird Stats
Morbid Facts

✚ "Natural" eco-friendly burials are gaining popularity in the US; they boast biodegradable coffins and discourage the use of traditional formaldehyde embalming on the deceased.

✚ Between the ages of twelve and 24, Toronto actor Brock Simpson appeared in the original *Prom Night* and all of its three sequels, each time as a different character.

✚ In January 2008, two 65-year-old New Yorkers used an office chair to wheel their recently deceased friend to a cheque-cashing store in an attempt to withdraw his Social Security payment. En route, they attracted the attention of several passersby and were arrested before their plot succeeded.

✚ Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* has never been out of print since its first edition was published in 1897.

✚ Asia has the highest suicide rate in the world, while South America and Africa have the most homicides.

✚ Glenn Miller's 1941 swing classic "Elmer's Tune" – which was also sung by a parasitic creature in Frank Henenlotter's film *Brain Damage* – was composed by Elmer Albrecht, a full-time Chicago mortician.

✚ The last woman hanged in Canada was Marguérite Pitre in January 1953, for her role in the bombing of an aircraft.

✚ John Belushi, the first *Saturday Night Live* cast member to die young, also appeared in the show's first death scene – the opening sketch of the premiere episode on October 11, 1975.

✚ More alien abductions are reported in the state of California than anywhere else in the US.

✚ The blaring horn sound that is repeated by Leviathan in *Hellraiser II* is actually morse code for "God."

✚ Traffic on one of Germany's autobahns came to a halt one day in 2003 after the rear doors of a moving hearse swung open and a coffin slid out onto the roadway.

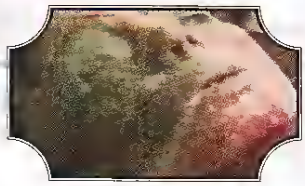
✚ The first Oscar ever awarded to a horror film was Best Actor for Fredric March's performance in 1932's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

✚ Public outcry recently erupted in Minneola, Florida when it was discovered that neighbourhood children were playing with old human bones that rose to the surface of a nearby unkempt 19th-century cemetery.

Compiled by **Monica S. Kuebler**
Got a weird stat or morbid fact?
Send it through to info@rue-morgue.com

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX

Instances of
ACID ANGUISH



1. *The Beyond*
Flesh-eating facial

2. *Diary of the Dead*
A zombie's burning baptism

3. *The Howling*
Eddie Quist's sulphuric face-splash

4. *Santa Sangre*
Post-coital crotch corrosion

5. *Cube*
Rennes' wrong room wreckage

6. *The Mist*
Searing spider spit



James Fisher **zircocircus.com**



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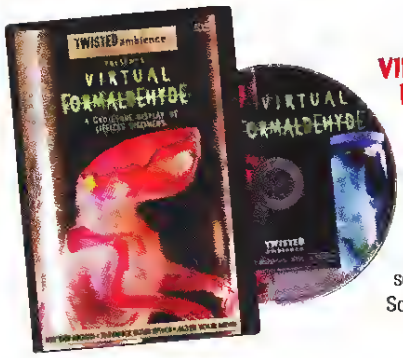


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DEAD GUY ALE

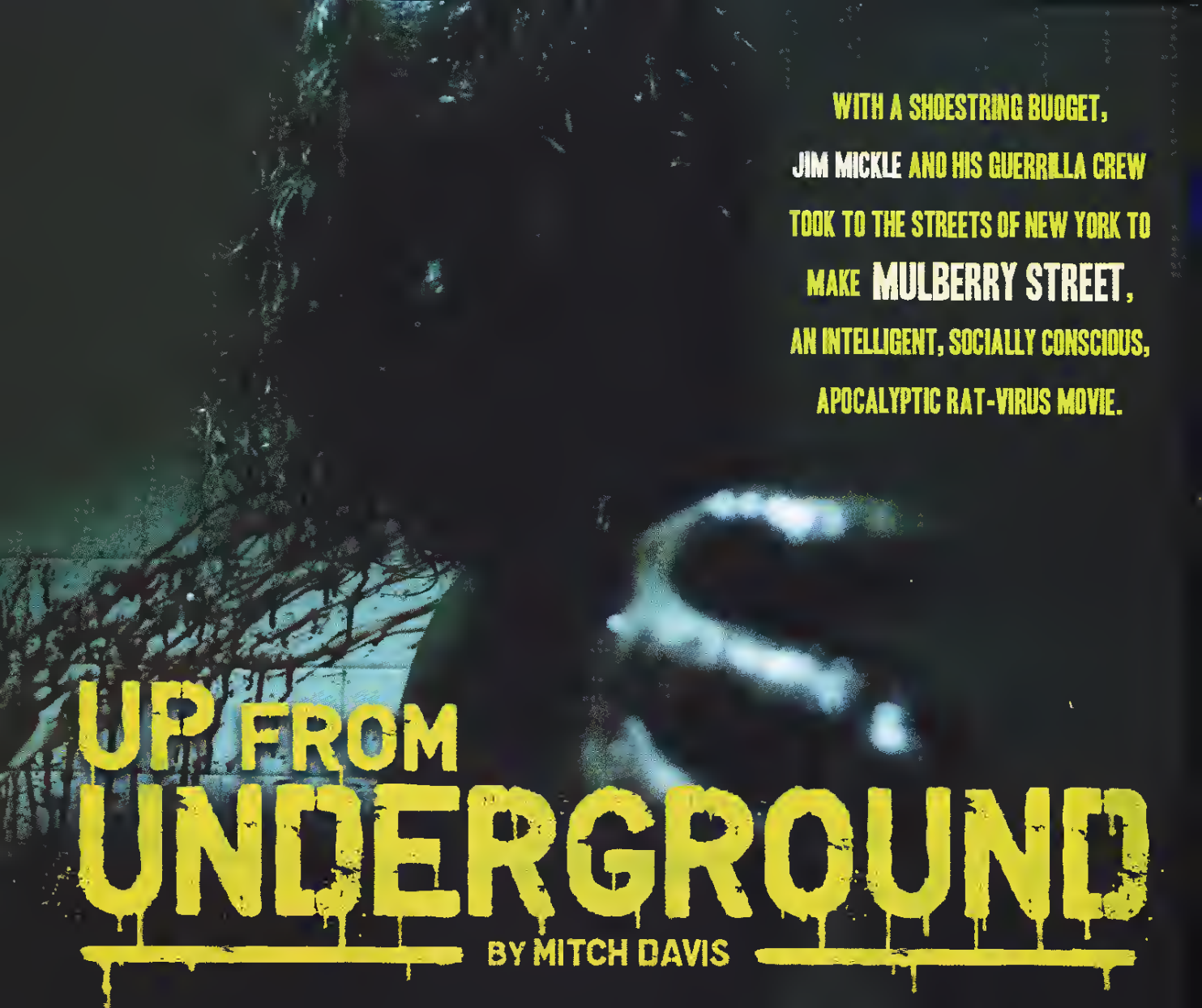
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WITH A SHOESTRING BUDGET, JIM MICKLE AND HIS GUERRILLA CREW TOOK TO THE STREETS OF NEW YORK TO MAKE MULBERRY STREET, AN INTELLIGENT, SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS, APOCALYPTIC RAT-VIRUS MOVIE.

UP FROM UNDERGROUND

BY MITCH DAVIS

As the dust settles, 2007 may well be remembered as the year of the apocalypse horror film. *The Mist*, *The Signal*, *Diary of The Dead*, *Right At Your Door*, *REC* and the "re-imagined" *I Am Legend* all burst through hearts and minds with character-driven, too-close-to-home depictions of society falling apart. Each is further linked by focusing on the very moment that life as we know it begins to shift into a near-animalistic maelstrom of distrust, loss, anger and terror. Upon viewing a succession of these works (well, perhaps not *I Am Legend*!), it's clear that our increasingly unstable times have given rise to an urgency and emotional purity not seen in genre cinema since the heyday of Vietnam-fuelled '70s horror. While Frank Darabont's masterful adaptation of King's *The Mist* deservedly shot to the top of fans' lists, a notably smaller, equally powerful American indie crept through the international festival circuit, and later into US cinemas as part of last year's 8 Films To Die For series (reviews p.22). Audiences were paralyzed by this disarmingly intimate tale of a group of impoverished New York City residents whose already tough lives become insurmountably tougher when a mutated rat-borne illness sweeps through their community, turning sufferers into rabid, infectious attackers. New York finds itself under assault by its own citizens and neighbourhoods are ripped to shreds over the course of a gruelling 24-hour period.

The film is *Mulberry Street*, which debuts on DVD this month from Lionsgate (in the lingering shadow of another NYC-set, shot-on-video apocalypse tale, the major studio monster movie *Cloverfield*). Director Jim Mickle is one of the strongest talents to emerge from the American independent scene in years, and his debut feature is an amazingly resonant, devastatingly human depiction of catastrophe that plays like highly political '70s Romero fused with the NYC grit of Abel Ferrara, the evocative urban poetics of Charles Bukowski and the raw character drama of John Cassavetes.

That it was shot practically for pennies on a 24P prosumer mini DV "borrowed" from the director's day job, largely in the redressed apartment of star/co-writer Nick Damici (see p.19), makes it all the more of a triumph. In fact, *Mulberry*'s scripting, staging, videography, editing, sound design and ensemble performances are so effective, it's difficult to imagine how a larger budget could have improved it, which, needless to say, is an achievement in no-budget filmmaking that occurs about as frequently as Halley's comet. Or the end-times.

Rue Morgue examines *Mulberry Street* – along with two other independent horror films appearing on DVD this month: Simon Rumley's *The Living and the Dead* (p.21) and Chris Sivertson's adaptation of Jack Ketchum's *The Lost* (p.22) – for a first-hand perspective on making an ultra-low-budget horror film that works. In the midst of preparing his second feature, an adaptation of Joe R. Lansdale's cult crime novel *Cold In July*, Mickle takes us behind the scenes of the DIY rat-monster apocalypse movie that's so much more.



First off, why rats?

Rats are as New York as the Yankees or the Statue of Liberty. At first it started with a quick way to spread the disease in a subway tunnel. The bird flu was terrifying the world, and this seemed like New York's answer to that. It also started out *very* campy in those early drafts, and the next 25-30 drafts were spent weeding out the camp and taking our B-movie premise seriously, almost as an experiment. The rats are what made it all fall into place. They somehow tied the politics, the social relevance, the location and the genre all together in one simple, instinctually creepy little symbol.

In addition to offering visceral horror,* Mulberry Street *works as a social and political allegory exploring urban gentrification, post-9/11 distrust and governmental abandonment of the poor. Were these themes always intended, or did they develop during the creation of the film?

A lot of it came about naturally as the story was developed. The first draft of the screenplay was much more of a balls-out B-movie with crazy set pieces and FX sequences, but during development and pre-production, we realized we'd never accomplish most of it with our budget. We went into our first day of shooting with a $27,000 budget! And so our rewrites were spent strengthening as much of the story as we could, so we wouldn't be relying just on the horror elements. That's where the characters and the social commentary came into play. Our original goal was to create a horror movie that would succeed even if we removed every genre element. And with one main location, you're basically trying to create an ensemble stage drama, in this case with a horror backdrop, and the challenge then is to find the right balance. That was being tweaked up until the sound mix. One of the later scenes where they're listening to radio reports echoing Katrina was added very late in the game. Hurricane Katrina struck during our three-week shoot, actually. So everything developed as we went along. The September 11th influence is almost completely subconscious but we knew it was there. We wrote what we knew and most, if not all, of our core crew were a few blocks away that morning, so our idea of a disaster – from the otherwise peaceful morning to the horrors of the day – was heavily influenced [by that].

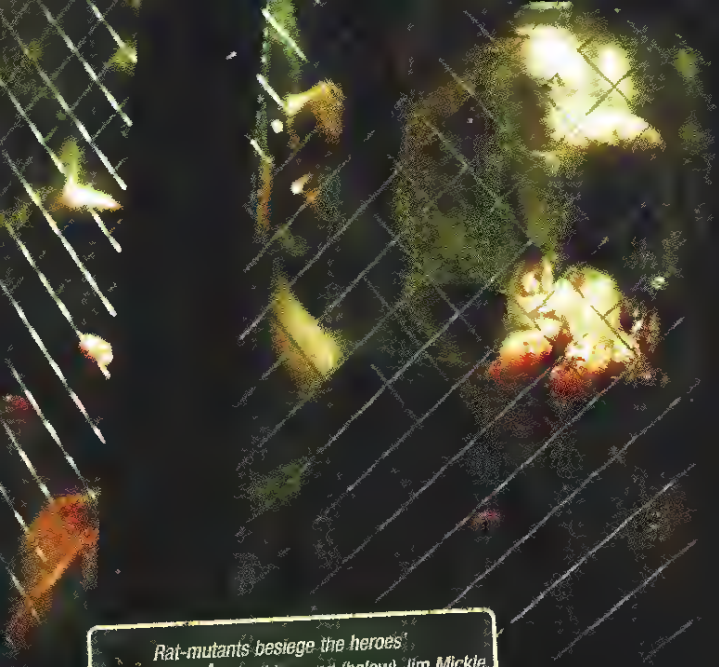
There's a strong sense of loss and abandonment, even before all hell breaks loose.

A lot of that is just New York. No one's ever completely happy here. I'd say I'm depressed 60 percent of the time because of this city, yet it has an addictive upside that keeps you hanging on to defend what little stake you might have here! One of my favourite personal themes of *Mulberry* is the idea that New York City is already so damned hard to live in for lower and middle class residents day to day. The epidemic in a way is just an exaggerated hardship of living in New York. So even though we're watching this old school neighbourhood of colourful characters, they're still dealing with the depressing realities of bills, soaring rents, ridiculous costs of living, crumbling apartments and hungry developers. The fun of the film for me is that the rat zombie outbreak is treated like just another pain-in-the-ass part of living in the city. These people have seen it all.

***Exterminator Needed:** A rat mutant feasts on flesh.*

Can you tell us some war stories about shooting something so large scale on such an insanely limited budget?

The most typical night of shooting was the alley rat attack scene in the middle of the film. That was actually a re-shot scene, so I had booked a quick job that needed to rent that camera and I hung onto it for the weekend to get some reshooting done. We threw one of Nick [Damici]'s guys from the gym into rat makeup for two hours, used my sister for another running attack, got a tiny crew and decided to steal the scene in Jersey Alley which is the coolest looking little alley in New York. We had no lights, so we found a couple drinking wine on the fire escape and we paid them $20 to drop an extension cord out of their window for a few hours. In the middle of the first shot, the super came out and called the cops and kicked us out. So we moved down out of their range about 50 feet and staged the



> "THE FUN OF THE FILM FOR ME IS THAT THE **RAT ZOMBIE OUTBREAK** IS TREATED LIKE JUST ANOTHER PAIN-IN-THE-ASS PART OF LIVING IN THE CITY." JIM MICKLE

Rat-mutants besiege the heroes' apartment building and (below) Jim Mickle.

sequence in front of two car headlights, and our DP Ryan Samul used little mirrors to catch the headlights to somehow create perfect three-point lighting for every shot of the scene. The couple went inside and kept the $20, and by the end of the night we were surrounded by about six police cars and guys in bulletproof vests who thought there was a real fight in the alley. I flashed my ancient, long-expired NYU student ID card and said it was a student film and they watched a few takes and laughed and went home. Pretty much every night had the same kind of story to it, but our mantra was: filmmaking is like going to war. You assemble a team, pick a battle site and surround yourself with people you trust your life with and do your best to survive.

Tell us about assembling a team for in front of the camera.

Casting was all in-house. We never reached out for unknowns and there were no auditions or rehearsals, just informal meetings to discuss characters and to see what kind of chemistry actors had. Most of the cast were friends of Nick Damici or Tim House, the actor who plays the superintendent, who also was our main financier. The rest were actors that I had worked with and wanted to work with again. Kim Blair [Clutch's daughter] and I dated in college, and she starred in another project Nick and I did and they worked incredibly well on screen together. Their intensities are just perfect together, and she's so strong and has the right instincts to carry her early solo scenes and create an interesting character with no dialogue and very few interactions. Frank, the bedridden vet with the oxygen tank, is played by Nick's real father, who had zero acting experience, but was able to be himself and fit in with veteran SAG actors, including his onscreen brother Charlie [Larry Fleischman], who has at least three decades of TV and film experience. Bo Corre [Kay the bartender] worked at a flower shop around the corner from Mulberry Street and Nick brought her in to talk about the script. Her onscreen son Otto [Javier Picayo] is one of Nick's kick-boxing students who happened to be a terrific young actor. A lot of the rest of the cast was made up of non-acting friends, co-workers, and a lot of real regulars from the bar.

The dialogue feels natural. Was there room for much improvisation?

Actors had complete freedom to improvise as much as they wanted to, but I think at the end we probably hit the script about 80 percent of the time. Nick's dialogue is timeless and he writes very natural dialogue, especially for New Yorkers. We had most of the characters cast months before shooting, so much of the dialogue was tailored specifically for the right actors. We did a table reading at one point with the whole cast and saw what felt right and what was better to just wing on set. For non-actors, it was a lot easier to give them the lines and the idea behind their dialogue and then let them go off and make it their own on the spot. Nick's dad was improvising like a pro by his second take on day one.



How'd you pull off the film's stunts?

We took it wherever we could get it and dressed our stunt guys in hats and different shirts and used them as many times as humanly possible. We had four stunt people total. One was Adam Morrow, our makeup FX guy who had done gymnastics when he was younger and so he offered to take a few tumbles for us in between touch-ups. He gets tackled probably four or five times in the movie. It terrifies me to think of it now, but at the end Nick and Kim opted to climb that seventh floor fire escape. It was rusty, untested, and had absolutely no safety, but when you're under the gun and the sun is going down, it's insane what people will do to get a shot.

Could you give aspiring filmmakers a quick primer on how to effectively steal crowd shots and locations in a giant city?

Just good timing, I guess. Everything we show on the TV reports was culled from footage we shot on the Fourth of July. Our fearless producer Linda Moran woke up that morning and realized the city kind of shuts down for the fireworks and so we drove all over Manhattan shooting roped off areas, and shut down streets and highways. The cuts are quick, but if you look closely most people are smiling and carrying US flags! The other thing we hit was a parade in Harlem. We basically sent Kim out to cut a path through the people while I followed her with the camera hidden under a jacket. We pushed through for about one long ten-minute take and just lucked out as

MULBERRY STREET STAR AND CO-WRITER NICK DAMICI EXPLAINS WHAT TO DO WHEN THE SKYSCRAPER'S THE LIMIT FOR YOUR LOW-BUDGET HORROR MOVIE.

MAN IN THE STREET

BY DAVE ALEXANDER

They say the sky's the limit when you're writing a script, so let your imagination run wild, which, if you're making an indie film, is total bullshit. The real imagination involves marrying your key concepts with the reality of your budget. How can you incorporate free locations? Who do you know willing to donate time or equipment? Can your friends act? How can you show a lot for a little?

Nick Damici understands this better than most. Not only did he co-write the script for *Mulberry Street*, he stars in it, *and* half of the film is shot in his small New York City apartment.

"My apartment served as Clutch's, Charlie and Frank's, and Kay and Otto's, with, I think, three repaint jobs plus redressing," he points out, listing off characters in the film inhabiting his real-life space. "Shooting so much in my apartment was tedious, like shooting in a submarine in one of hottest spells we've had [in the city] recently."

Damici, a dyed-in-the-wool New Yorker with acting credits on TV shows *Law & Order*, *CSI* and *The Black Donnellys*, plays the aforementioned Clutch, a former boxer who puts his fists to good use fighting monsters.

"Clutch is the closest to me of any character I've ever played," Damici says "I'm just a New Yorker; I do box and still train regularly, so it was a no-brainer that Clutch should be a boxer. It also gave a unique way to fight the ratzoids, with fists instead of guns and grenades. We didn't want a shoot-'em-up over-the-top actioneer. … As an actor, I generally play cops and crooks, so it was refreshing to play a regular Joe."

When Damici and director/co-writer Jim Mickle first conceived of *Mulberry Street*, it was more of a "classic zombie flick" in the tradition of *Night of the Living Dead*, set in Pennsylvania (where Mickle hails from) in the winter. Many drafts later – for the sake of budget, convenience, as well as a desire to tell a more socially conscious NYC-centric story – the film became about neighbours in a soon-to-be-torn-down tenement banding together against a surge of rabid, mutating rat-people (effectively – cost and otherwise – depicted in glimpses and shadows).

"We wanted to make a film that would hold up as a character piece and deliver the horror element. Rats are a common inner city fear and we thought it would be fun to capitalize on that," explains Damici, adding, "I have no fear of rats at all... except for those running our government."

The filmmakers' marry their politics to genre conventions – without throwing it in the viewer's face. Giant developer billboards, for example, loom on the skyline, reminding lower class New Yorkers that they're constantly being squeezed out, which adds a layer of tension to the story.

Damici says, "Without using a big stick to beat you on the head, I wanted to address the vanishing lower middle class that years ago made up most of the city. So we kind of recreated the tenement environment of my youth in the late '60s and early '70s when everyone in a building knew each other and took care of each other – something that exists less and less as New York falls prey to gentrification and real estate greed."

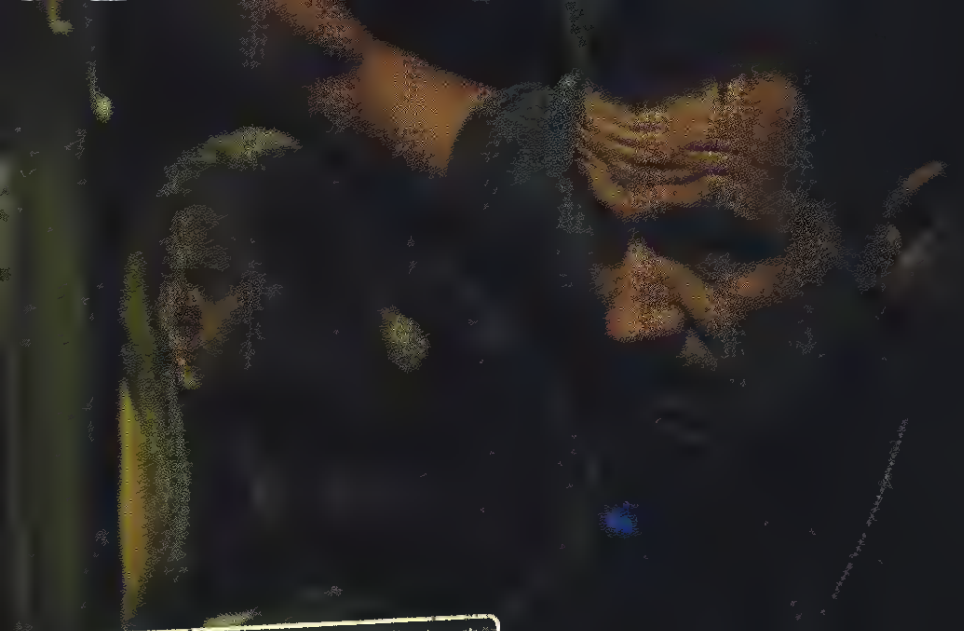
The crew had all the free production value it needed by taking to NYC's changing streets to snag shots of the billboards, real New York rats scurrying in the street and emergency vehicles screaming by. As such, the city itself feels like a character, simmering in the summer heat before the rat creature outbreak boils over into its streets. In the end, the city didn't just facilitate the story, it guided it.

So then, if given millions to work with, instead of tens of thousands, would Damici still choose homegrown horror?

"I often think about what would happen if it snowed for ten days straight or rained for that matter," he says. "New York is an island and without the bridges and tunnels would become immediately isolated. What would happen when the electricity went down, when deliveries halted, when food ran out, ten days of snow? How many would die? Well, a bigger budget and we might have another movie there."



Nick Damici as ex-boxer and long-time New Yorker Clutch.



Clutch (Nick Damici) and Kay (Bo Corre) sneak past the rat monsters, and (below) Charlie (Larry Fleishman) hides in his apartment.

ambulances and cop cars screamed past us. Cut that all down to twenty seconds and throw in the right sound effects and you've got a couple hundred free extras.

Nobody seeing the film would guess that every apartment in the film is actually Nick's!

That's one of the first things that tipped me off that we had it in us to pull off this massive project. It was a day or two before the first shoot day and Nick's upstairs neighbour – who we based Charlie, the old deaf guy, on – wouldn't answer his door when we came up to start dressing the set in his kitchen. Everyone agrees [to lending their apartment] at first 'til they realize what it actually means. So it was our first real day of work and my sister and her tiny art team and Nick and I stood in the hallway listening to him on the other side of the door not answering. The same thing happened with most of the apartments in the building where we planned to shoot all the characters at home. And before we could even hit that moment of despair, we all laughed and said, "Shit. Let's just do it all at Nick's!" Nick affectionately labelled it "our submarine movie" because we had twenty people crammed into a railroad apartment in the height of summer and the equipment and set decorations for three or four sets are always just out of range of the frame.

It's refreshing that, for a siege horror film set in a major US city, not one of Mulberry Street's characters ever pulls out a gun. What took you in this direction?

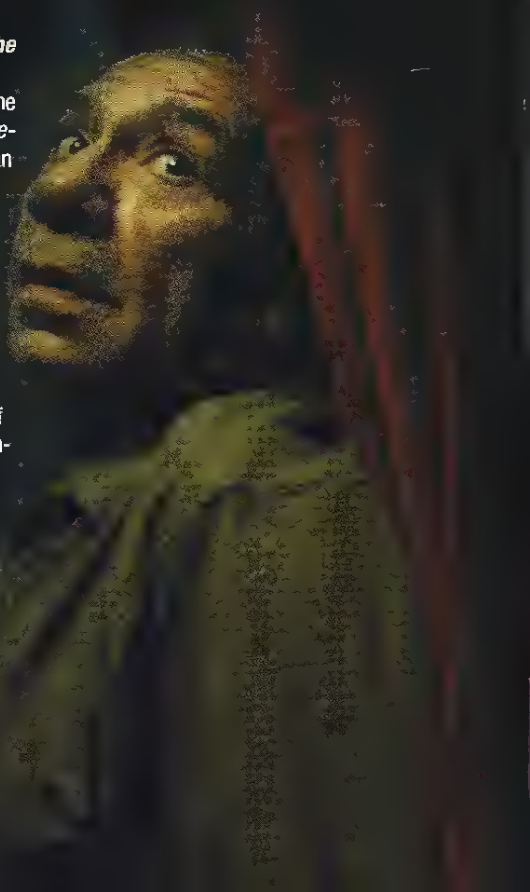
Just the desire to be different and try to flip the classic clichés. Every zombie movie at some point becomes a shootout, but if you think about it, guns and zombies are pretty much the least dramatic combination. It's such an easy way out and there's no defense so it's really just an excuse to show off pyrofechnics and blood splatter techniques and kill five minutes while you wait for the real climax. That's fun too, but again it's not the movie we wanted to try to make. I've heard a lot of people criticize us for it, especially since it's set in New York, but I think it's another bullshit stereotype that we wanted to buck. I don't own a gun and nobody I know in the city owns a gun. It's funny but when I go home to rural Pennsylvania, *that's* when I see guns.

Which filmmakers shaped you over the years?

Off the bat, it was Sam Raimi who I first got the bug from. I spent my entire summer as a twelve-year-old watching the *Evil Dead* trilogy on an endless loop. Then Peter Jackson, David Lynch, Argento and all the usual horror suspects. It's funny but I went from loving everything about the horror genre, to going through film school as a complete film geek obsessed with independent art films and foreign films, and loathing anything commercial or genre. But at some point at NYU I either regressed or re-evolved and got so fed up with spoiled rich kids making pretentious crap about their witty observations about love, and life, and blah, blah, blah, [that] I went back and realized again that the horror genre fucking rules! It's the last place you can get away with really experimenting with film without ruining its chance for a wider appeal. It's actually encouraged by the audience to push the envelope with every technique and decision from stories to colours and sound. Now that I look at it, *Mulberry Street* is the exact culmination of that balance of appreciation between "art film" and genre piece. I think now I really appreciate the guys who experiment with genres, like the Coen Brothers, Walter Hill and Alex de la Iglesia. I'd say my favourite all-time film is Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine*.

As audiences outside the festival circuit get increasingly more difficult to interest, where do you as an indie filmmaker see the horror genre going in the next five years?

Probably continuing the same trend, but maybe even more extreme. It seems like there's maybe a bigger disparity between the studio crap and the outside-the-box fantasy festival stuff in the last few years. Maybe it's because I finally got to see it first-hand last year, but I actually feel like the indies are doing quite well with our film, *The Signal*, *Poughkeepsie Tapes*, *Hatchet*, *À l'intérieur*, etc. all getting a good deal of attention. I've never felt more inspired than I felt leaving [the] Brussels, FanTasia, and Sitges [film festivals] and seeing the masses with such an astounding appetite for dark genre material, and then seeing a ton of really great, inventive movies from all over the world. More and more I think it's catching on and the internet buzz behind these titles actually does work. The whole online/digital release forum is such a big question mark that I think will ultimately work out for the genre, since it's already populated by people on the lookout for fringe material. It can only be good for the genre. ☠



UK FILMMAKER SIMON RUMLEY CHALLENGES POPULAR NOTIONS OF WHAT DEFINES THE GENRE WITH HIS LATEST INDIE FILM THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

REGRESSIONS OF A DANGEROUS MIND

BY KIER-LA JANISSE



There is a quiet revolution happening over the sea, led by a fiery crew of young UK horror filmmakers who believe in storytelling and strong character performances, who believe that horror is at its purest when faced with tha constraints of a low budget. At the cantre of this motley gang is Simon Rumley, the 37-year-old writer/director/producer of festival showstopper *The Living and the Dead*.

Now, this is no ordinary horror film, and many argue that it's not a horror film at all. But decades ago it would have been in the company of such films as *House of Usher* (1960), *Mumsy, Nanny, Sonny and Girly* (1969) or *Symptoms* (1974). Tales of crumbling old houses mirroring the psyches of their tenants ran rampant in the genre once upon a time, and oftentimes the creepy house was enough. But *The Living and the Dead* – on DVD this month from TLA – has all that and more.

"I started off describing the film as a metaphysical horror," says Rumley of his $500,000 mini-masterpiece. "Ultimately, however, I came to describe the film as a tragedy in the Greek sense."

The story has Lord Brocklebank (prolific British character actor Roger Lloyd-Pack) living with his terminally ill wife, Lady Brocklebank, and thair developmentally challenged son James in a decaying mansion in England's remote countryside. When forced to go away on business, Lord B turns the care of his sickly wife over to a nurse, but James has other plans. Tired of being treated like a child, he decides to prove himself by caring for his mother on his own. He locks the nurse out of tha house, and the story takes a chilling turn as James neglects to take his pills and improperly medicates his mother while simultaneously starving and humiliating her. As his frustration amplifies and his lack of meds obscures reality from fantasy, he starts behaving violently; his mother is helpless against the mounting threat posed by her own son.

Inspired by his own mother's battle with terminal cancer, Rumley has turned out a remarkable genre-straddler. And central to his exploration of emotional catastrophe is Leo Bill as James.

"I have to say I think [Leo] did an amazing job," Rumley asserts. "All the actors did, but he did especially because it's a role which if done incorrectly could easily have scuppered the whole film."

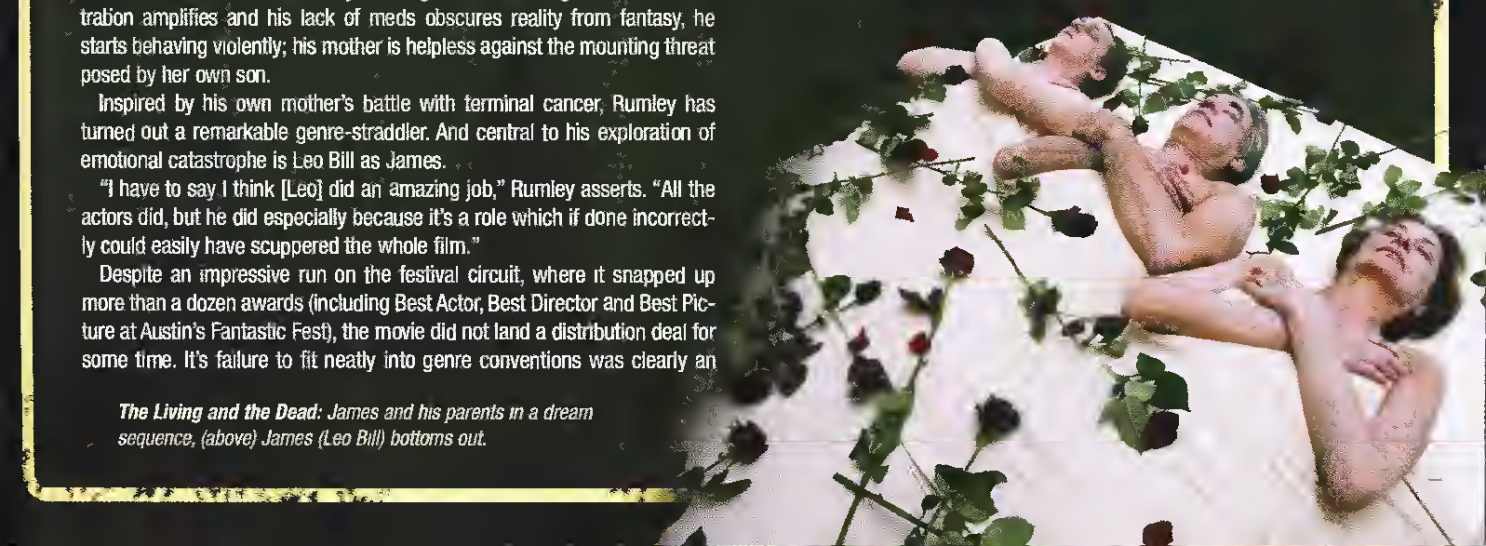
Despite an impressive run on the festival circuit, where it snapped up more than a dozen awards (including Best Actor, Best Director and Best Picture at Austin's Fantastic Fest), the movie did not land a distribution deal for some time. It's failure to fit neatly into genre conventions was clearly an obstacle. "With a few exceptions sales agents are the second-hand car salesmen of the industry," Rumley muses. "If they don't understand something or don't think they can make a quick buck, they're not interested."

Back in England, Rumley finds refuge among a thriving scene of like-minded genre filmmakers, including Sean Hogan (*Lie Still*), Andrew Parkinson (*Venus Drowning*), Michael Bartlett and Kevin Gates (*The Zombie Diaries*), Peter Stanley-Ward (*Small Town Folk*) and Julian Richards (*Summer Scars*).

"There does seem to be an independent ethos amongst a number of people who aren't bothering going to the Film Council or Channel 4 for money," offers Rumley, "because although execs will tell you they're looking for writers and directors with independent voices, the last thing most execs want is an independent filmmaker with an independent voice! You start talking to these people who want to make 'horror' films but actually try to engage in a conversation about Val Lewton or Ruggero Daodato or Shinya Tsukamoto and, not that I'm an expert, but you'll get a blank expression more often than not."

Rumley confirms that a few of the new breed are even joining forces on a project, set to start shooting this summer. He plans to collaborate with Hogan and Parkinson on a film anthology focusing on "psycho-sexual situations," called *Little Deaths*.

"Each script is quite different in its perception of what horror is," he asserts, "and since we're not being constrained by what someone else wants us to do, it's an interesting and thought-provoking mix."



The Living and the Dead: *James and his parents in a dream sequence, (above) James (Leo Bill) bottoms out.*

MULBERRY STREET IS JOINED ON DVD THIS MONTH BY SEVEN OTHER INDEPENDENT FEATURES IN LIONSGATE'S LATEST AFTER DARK SERIES.

MORE TO DIE FOR

REVIEWS BY JAMES GRAINGER, LAST CHANCE LANCE AND JUSTINE WARWICK



BORDERLAND

Zev Berman

A premise like *Borderland*'s – the "true story" of a group of America teenagers who cross the border into Mexico (for a pre-college beer, weed and pussy hunt) and fall foul of a drug-running Santerian cult seeking victims for human sacrifice – can go one of two ways, and unfortunately this one doesn't end up anywhere good.

The opening scene, in which two cops stumble upon the cult by accident, with disastrous consequences, is tense, gory and shocking. But the movie stumbles downhill from there like a drunken co-ed on Spring Break. The characterization is weak, the plot is predictable, and the plentiful gore and flashy cinematography don't make up for the fact that the occult sequences are totally stenle and underplayed. There's really no atmosphere or tension about them, and you're consequently left with the feeling that most of the ritual's participants took up black magic as something to do on a wet Wednesday, rather than for worldly power and invincibility.



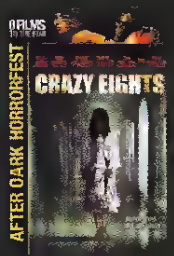
The non-subtle visual references to *The Hills Have Eyes* don't help anything, since they only underscore that *Borderland* is a deeply boring movie. It's nothing you haven't seen before and better. **JW**

CRAZY EIGHTS

James Koya Jones

It's amazing what a seasoned cast can add to an indie film, and *Crazy Eights* is a great example, as it boasts Traci Lords (*Blade*), Gabrielle Anwar (*Body Snatchers*) and Dina Meyer (*Saw III*).

They play three of six childhood companions who reunite at a funeral to carry out the dying wish of a friend, which involves travelling to the country to locate a time capsule they left there twenty years earlier. When they find it, they unknowingly release an evil spirit from their collective past and end up trapped in an abandoned hospital where they had once been held as children and subjected to horrific scientific experiments.



The capable acting of Lords and Meyer aside, Anwar also steps up to the plate and delivers a memorable performance as her character's mind quickly deteriorates and fills with suicidal thoughts. The real star of the movie, however, is the hospital itself. Cinematographer Stephen Lyons makes fantastic use of the crumbling corridors and decaying interiors, which lend each scene a sense of despair and claustrophobic hopelessness.

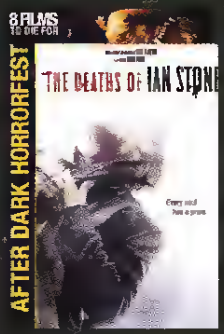
A psychological horror with very few gore effects, *Crazy Eights* proves to be a modern American ghost story with a new twist – it's actually kind of scary. **LCL**

THE DEATHS OF IAN STONE

Dario Piana

Ian Stone is a man with a problem: every day he wakes up in a new version of his life, only to be brutally murdered at around five o'clock, and he doesn't know why. When a mysterious stranger recognizes him one day, and urges him to "remember" who he is, Ian is forced to confront not only his own past, but also his most basic notions of reality itself.

The Deaths of Ian Stone is a smart, energetic and entertaining movie; although the premise sounds like a horror version of *Groundhog Day*, it's really more like a gory feature-length episode of *Doctor Who*, with no Doctor on hand to solve the mystery and save the day. And, like the early seasons of *Doctor Who*, it compensates for a reasonably low budget with a good script, solid acting (including *Cloverfield*'s Mike Vogel as the title character) and understated effects; director Dario Piana teases his audience with tantalizing hints of the horror stalking Ian, and keeps the tension high while keeping the plot comprehensible. There are a few cheesy moments (unfortunately, the last line of the closing scene is one of them) but all in all, it's a pretty sturdy effort and worth a look. **JW**





Unearthed: *Matthew Leutwyler's campy, CGI monster film.*

LAKE DEAD

George Bessudo

With a title like *Lake Dead* one expects a movie about a lake full of zombies, some kind of mutanf piranhas or maybe even a gigantic croc. Unfortunafely, what you get are 90 minutes of the kind of mundane, thoughtless bullshif reminiscent of the plethora of no-budget slasher films that dogged video store shelves back in the '80s.



When three clueless sisters find out fhat they've inherited a motel out in the country from their grandfather, they decide to go check it out with their boyfriends. Instead of staying at the mofel, though, they camp ouf in fhe woods (?!?) and wind up being hunted by a pair of mute, deformed hillbillies who hope to use them as breeding stock.

If this was supposed to pay homage to *The Hills Have Eyes*, it fails miserably. It consistently telegraphs its sorry excuse for a plot and its pathetic ending to an audience which has little sympathy for the cardboard characters onscreen. You'll find yourself rooting for the bad guys to win just to gef the film over and done wifh. I'll take zombies, mutant piranhas, gianf alligators and just about anything else over this backwoods bullshit any day of the week. **LCL**

NIGHTMARE MAN

Rolfe Kanefsky

If you feel like putting your brain on hold – way on hold – and taking in a mindless horror flick, fhis is the one for you. *Nightmare Man*'s got it all, folks: a masked murderer, sexy girls trapped in a cabin in the woods, cars running out of gas, cellphones not working, a hot shower scene, a fake orgasm and super-hot Tiffany Shepis (*Tromeo and Juliet*), who spends half of the movie wearing nothing but her bra and panfies. What more do you want? A plot? Oh, in that case, you're shit out of luck.



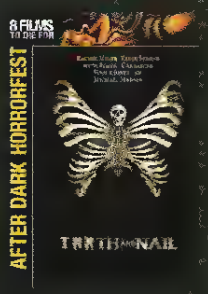
Shepis plays a woman whose husband is taking her to be institutionalized because she thinks a demon is trying fo kill her. When fheir car breaks down, the demon comes for her and she runs into the woods only to be rescued by two horny couples who aren't quite sure if the demon is real or if she's a psychotic maniac.

Rolfe Kanefsky, whose previous directorial experience is limited to a handful of lousy softcore pornos and some pretty flaccid horror drivel (e.g. *The Hazing* and *Corpses*), throws fogefher the kind of half-assed, cliché-fest that should've been relegated to the delete bin, not a horror festival. **LCL**

TOOTH & NAIL

Mark Young

"Who plans for an apocalypse?" intones fhe narrator at the beginning of *Tooth & Nail*, a post-apocalyptic survival tale that asks viewers to believe civilization completely collapsed, taking out most of the population, two years after the world's oil wells run dry. The answer to that question, as it soon becomes obvious, are nof the dummies holed up in an abandoned hospital with the front doors unguarded. Led by an ex-professor nicknamed "Oarwin," the rag-tag survivors sit around filtering wafer, eating rations and waiting for something to happen. Trouble arrives in the form of a group of murderous cannibals called The Rovers, who, like all post-apocalyptic marauders, dress like a Judas Priest cover band. Led by Michael Madsen (spewing lame tag lines non-stop), the Rovers prey on the survivors, serving them up for dinner. Incapable of forming a plan of action, the dumb-ass heroes wait for dusk to hide, are easily found, and then flee from their hunters while carrying lit flashlights. Luckily, neither party is smart enough to grab any of the ample weaponry lying around.



How either group lived through a doomsday that wiped out America's best and brighfest is never explained. Call it survival of the twits – and avoid it. **JG**

UNEARTHED

Matthew Leutwyler

This cookie-cutter monster flick would have been a lof better if it had either surrendered to the inherent campiness of its plot or really gone for the viewer's jugular. As it is, *Unearthed* too often feels like a lame distillation of dozens of superior takes on fhe murderous-beast-besieges-isolated-victims flick.

Here, said victims are a native woman and her grandfather, assorted townies and some outsiders – thrown togefher near a New Mexico reservation after a fuel truck crashes, knocking out the local power supply. The CGI monster, an *Alien* rip-off fhaf looks like it was created on a Commodore 64, is awakened by a meddling archaeologist. After nearly wiping out the native population cenfuries earlier, it was poisoned into a comatose state, but now it's hungry for anyone in reach.



Director Matthew Leutwyler (*Dead and Breakfast*) makes the most of his desert setting and sets up a few good scare and kill scenes, buf he should have left the writing to a steadier hand. Characters and clichéd subplots are half-developed and the dialogue is often beyond lame, which could have led to a lof of onscreen fun if Leutwyler didn't present the shenanigans with such a straight face. **JG**



CHRIS SIVERTSON'S ADAPTATION OF THE LOST FEATURES A PROTAGONIST SO UNBEARABLY EVIL YET IRRESISTIBLY CHARMING, EVEN GENRE FANS ARE SPLIT ON...

SPOTLIGHT ON INDIE HORROR

JACK KETCHUM'S BAD SEED

BY BRAD ABRAHAM

"Right from the first screenings the reception was divisive; people either loved it or hated it. There was no middle ground, but I expected that and was prepared for it," states Chris Sivertson of his indie movie adaptation of Jack Ketchum's novel *The Lost*. When it premiered at the South by Southwest multimedia festival (SXSW) in 2006, it was a blunt force trauma to the cranium that left its audience stunned. People were buzzing about it, and that alone made Sivertson (*I Know Who Killed Me*) a happy man.

"I was a big fan of the book; it made me so uncomfortable, and by the end I was just gutted," he recalls of his own experience with the original novel. "I'm used to extreme stuff but this knocked me dead. It wasn't a bloodbath type of tale – it was worse. We knew the fuse had been lit from the first page and spent the entire story watching it burn. And when it finally exploded, the reaction to the film told me I had done a good job."

Based on Ketchum's incendiary 2001 novel, which in turn is based on the true-life "Pied Piper Killer" Charles Schmid, *The Lost* is the story of Ray Pye (Marc Senter), a nineteen-year-old sociopath who, while hanging out at a campground with friends Tim (Alex Frost) and Jennifer (Shay Astar), decides on the spur of the moment to murder two young women (including one played by Erin Brown, a.k.a. Misty Mundae) . Four years later, Ray is still a free man, never charged with the murders; but one cop is determined to make him pay. Ray figures he's in the clear; Tim and Jennifer think the worst is behind them, that the horrors are all in the past. They're wrong.

The inevitable explosion of rage that propels the film to its grim conclusion recalls '60s shockers such as *Bonnie & Clyde* and *The Wild Bunch*. It speaks to the current climate in film that, unlike the aforementioned titles, no studio would dare go near *The Lost*, a movie that seems determined to punish its audience, even in a world of cheap-thrill gore like *Hostel* and *Saw*.

"I thought [*The Lost*] would make a great movie," says Sivertson, "but I had zero resources to make that happen, and knew no studio would get behind it." Enter *May* director Lucky McKee, a close friend of Sivertson (they co-directed the student film *All Cheerleaders Die* in 2001). McKee optioned the book for him to adapt and direct, and came on board as producer. The next challenge was to update the story from its 1969 setting, in order to accommodate the small budget.

"To be honest, had I the resources to do a period movie I would have," admits Sivertson. "But I realized it worked just as well in the modern day. By making it 'modern' there was an immediacy that wasn't there before. These were kids we all knew no matter when we grew up. Anyone who's lived in a city or town or neighbourhood knows who the 'bad kids' are, the ones their parents warn them about. That's why Jack [Ketchum] calls them "The Lost" – they're outsiders and misfits who couldn't give a shit."

The most maladjusted of all the misfits in the film is, of course, the film's anti-hero, highly unpredictable, sociopathic charmer Ray Pye. With slicked-back hair, pale makeup, cosmetic mole and twitching gait (thanks to crushed beer cans stuffed into his boots to give him added height), he's a walking, doping, screwing bundle of toxic energy.

"Marc was a real method guy and literally became Ray Pye," says Sivertson. "He dressed, walked, talked like him the whole time. It was tricky too, because he had to be the hero, the villain, the comic relief. We were asking a lot of the audience – to begin the movie with this guy murdering two women, and then spend the rest of the story following him around. He's a monster and we know that, but we can't help but like him, especially when we learn just how messed up he is."

With its DVD release this month from Anchor Bay, *The Lost* is poised to find a wider audience. And judging by the reactions it has already received, Sivertson takes some cold comfort in that fact.

"What I wasn't expecting was a lot of empathy for Ray! Core [audience] groups – always male – could actually relate to him, which goes to show that there are a lot of Ray Pyes out there!"



Evil Incarnate: *A murder victim (Misty Mundae), and (above) Marc Senter as the predatory Ray Pye.*

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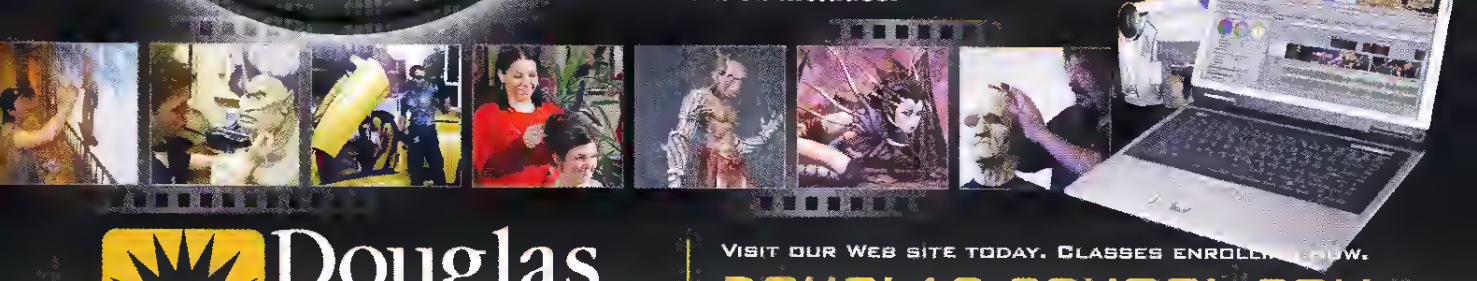
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DIRECTOR **PAUL LYNCH** TELLS THE STORY OF CREATING ***PROM NIGHT***, CANADA'S FIRST SLASHER FRANCHISE, IN ALL OF ITS EARLY '80s, LOW-BUDGET GLORY.

MASSACRE AT HAMILTON HIGH

BY JAMES BURRELL

Maple syrup slashers – those Canadian-made horror pics produced in the wake of John Carpenter's *Halloween* – are mostly forgotten, overshadowed by the exploits of their knife-wielding American cousins. An exception, though, is the fondly remembered 1980 cult flick *Prom Night*. It remains a classic example of the slasher genre despite detractors who assert that it's nothing more than a poorly executed version of *Halloween* with *Carrie* and *Saturday Night Fever* thrown in.

"It's *Halloween* in a high school. I won't disagree with that," confesses the film's director, Liverpool-born Paul Lynch, noting that John Carpenter's iconic horror film was itself born from Bob Clark's Canuck proto-slasher *Black Christmas*. "*Black Christmas* led to *Halloween* and *Halloween* led to *Prom Night*."

The film opens with a childhood game gone tragically awry when little Robin Hammond falls to her death from a top floor window of an abandoned, dilapidated convent. Flash forward six years and a masked killer takes to the high school prom, seeking retribution on the group of now-grown teens he deems responsible for her death.

Prom Night contains several of the archetypal trappings that would become a staple of the slasher phenomenon: dark and isolated locations, various red herrings, fervent teens who embark on a night of hedonistic celebration and a merciless killer who dispatches them one by one. It's very much a product of its time and place, and this holds true behind the camera, as well.

Driving the Canadian genre explosion of the early '80s, including slashers such as *My Bloody Valentine*, *Curtains*, *Happy Birthday to Me* and *Visiting Hours*, were the government's tax incentives. Formally known as the Capital Cost Allowance, they resulted in a record number (albeit usually less than stellar in quality) of Canadian movies being produced.

"It was the time of the tax shelter," recalls Lynch, "where you invested your money in a film and could have a 100 percent write-off. So anything that seemed reasonable, that people were behind, generally found financing.



Axe Fodder: *Anne-Marie Martin as victim Wendy Richards, and (below) David Mucci*

BLACK CHRISTMAS LED TO HALLOWEEN AND HALLOWEEN LED TO PROM NIGHT

PAUL LYNCH

By '79, it was a great time to be making films in Toronto because you would go over to the Four Seasons Hotel or the Courtyard Café and it would be packed with stars and wannabe producers and there was a real excitement about the business."

Prom Night was born out of a desire Lynch had to break into more commercial filmmaking. His previous two features, *The Hard Part Begins* and *Blood & Guts*, were small independents that, although critically acclaimed, failed to reach make an impact at the box office. Figuring the lucrative horror genre was the most surefire way to the big time, he came up with a concept to pitch around to producers.

"I decided to work on an idea called *Don't See the Doctor*," says Lynch. "I had done a poster for it because I had originally been in advertising, and back in the '70s there were several producers that would make posters for their films and take them to the studios, and the studios would green-light the picture on the basis of the poster. I knew a guy who had done this for *The Legend of Boggy Creek* and *The Town That Dreaded Sundown*."

Lynch approached Irwin Yablans (an executive producer on *Halloween*), with the *Don't See the Doctor* idea, but Yablans was unimpressed.

"He said, 'No, no, no, doctors are grotesque,'" recalls Lynch. "'People don't want to see that. We've had very good success with *Halloween* – how about another holiday?' And I said, 'You mean like Thanksgiving and cannibalism?' And he said, 'No, that's distasteful! Think of some holiday and get back to me.'"

Lynch left, and as he was driving back to Los Angeles passed a billboard for After Six Formals, advertising formal wear for prom night. "I thought, now, there's a kind of event for kids. And 'Prom' and 'Night' sound nice together – pleasant but horrific at the same time,'" he notes.

After unsuccessfully trying to reach Yablans, Lynch ran into legendary Canadian producer Peter Simpson at a filmmakers' function. Simpson agreed to produce the film through his company Simcom, and had William Gray, who had previously penned the classic Canadian-made adaptation of *The Changeling*, write the script. *Prom Night* was shot in Toronto in August and September of 1979 for $1.6 million.

Leslie Nielson – around the time he was first becoming famous as a comic actor – was cast in a supporting role, but the big draw, of course, wound up being budding Scream Queen Jamie Lee Curtis.

The then-21-year-old, fresh off roles in *Halloween* and *The Fog*, plays *Prom Night*'s protagonist, Kim. Surprisingly, neither Lynch nor Simpson initially saw her as being suitable for the material.

"I didn't want her originally," admits Lynch. "I wanted a girl who had done TV movies. [specifically *The Brady Bunch*'s Eve Plumb, who was trying to branch out into dramatic roles]. But Jamie's manager came in with Jamie and she really fought to get *Prom Night*. I'm not quite sure why, but she wanted it. In those days, even though *Halloween* was a huge success, it didn't lead to anything. Today it would, but in those days, she was just another actress and she was in a B-movie and life went on."

After *Prom Night* was shot, distributors AVCO Embassy insisted that Lynch punch up the pacing of the film and capitalize more on the success of *Halloween* by adding in scenes of the search for an escaped, violent mental patient.

"My intention was to do a version of *Psycho*, not of anything else," points out Lynch. "The two films I quite liked were *Psycho* and *Halloween*, and I came from *Psycho*, where you built up slowly to the big end . but AVCO Embassy thought it needed some more pizzazz or something in the opening. So I went back and re-shot for three days on the psycho-on-the-loose idea."

Featuring the tagline "If you're not back by midnight... you won't be coming home!," *Prom Night* became one of the biggest grossing Canadian films of 1980, earning close to $15 million in the US and getting nominated for two Genie Awards.

"I thought that the concept would do well, based on what was happening at the time with things like *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* and *Halloween*," says Lynch. "But I didn't think that it would do as well as it did. What pushed it over the edge – and what I think was at least 70 percent of the success for that film – was Jamie Lee Curtis because she had just done *Halloween* and was a genuine star to that audience."



AS FAR AS SLASHER SCORES GO, PROM NIGHT BOOGIES TO A DIFFERENT BEAT.

DEATH BY DISCO

Equally admired and vilified, Paul Zaza and Carl Zittrer's score for *Prom Night* is anything but typical. Although it contains the expected ominous orchestral cues, includes some sombre pop ballads and rock cues, it has earned its cult following for its outrageous disco songs.

Producer Peter Simpson, a man not known to mince words, told Zaza to create six disco tracks as similar as possible to chart toppers blasting from AM radios at the time. Zaza, a Genie Award winner (for Bob Clark's *Murder By Decree*) faced what would be one of his most difficult scores to complete.

"Peter Simpson had absolutely no concept of the process," says Zaza. "He told me, 'We need these disco songs. We can't [afford] the rights to them, so you're going to have to rip them off. You have one week to do them.' I have *six songs* in *six days* to write, create, record, mix and edit to fit the film. And I have no idea how I'm going to rip off a song like 'I Will Survive.'"



For the film's more sinister sounds, the musicians, who lacked the budget for an orchestra, had to be exceedingly resourceful. "We were trying all kinds of shit like throwing a bucket of nails inside the piano, putting the tape on backwards," recalls Zaza, "all the stuff you had to do back then when you didn't have computers."

For appreciative fans trying to get hold of the score, it's been an exercise in frustration. Never commercially available in North America, a *Prom Night* soundtrack LP was released in Japan by RCA. With only a few thousand copies pressed, mint condition records now go for hundreds of dollars.

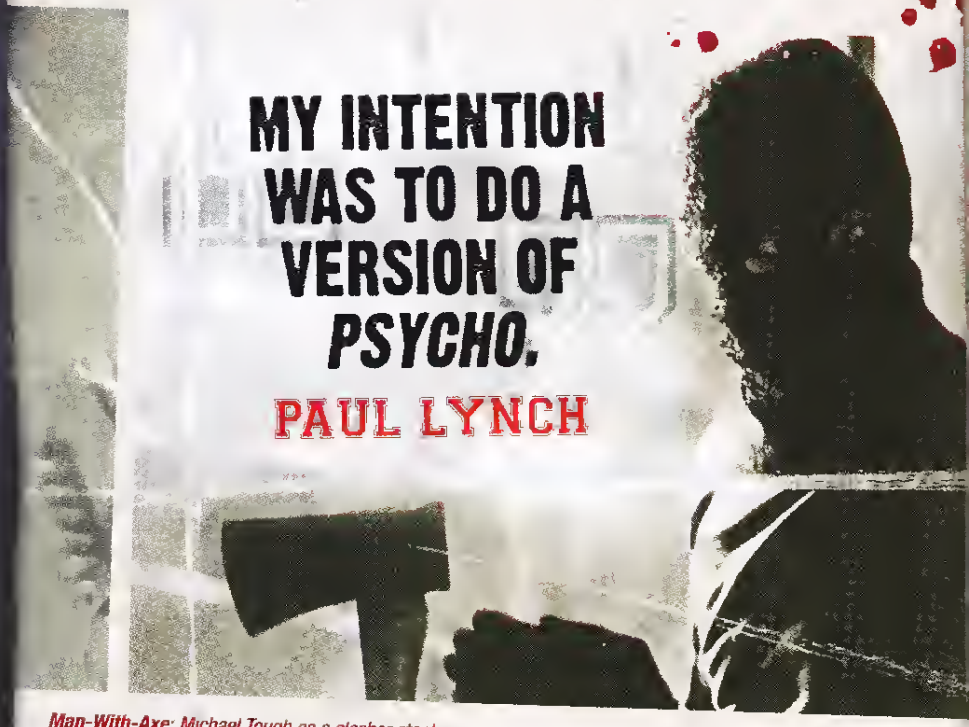
"I've had so many emails and people writing to me asking for the soundtrack," says Zaza, who went on to score the *Prom Night* sequels, as well as CanCon chillers *Curtains*, *My Bloody Valentine* and *Popcorn*. He plans to finally re-release the music from *Prom Night* (disco and all) some time in the future, as part of a compilation of his work.

"It's not the greatest score or the greatest movie ever made," he admits, "But I think given what we had to work with, the music fits the film quite appropriately."

James Burrell

MY INTENTION WAS TO DO A VERSION OF *PSYCHO*.

PAUL LYNCH



Man-With-Axe: *Michael Tough as a slasher staple*

After Lynch's movie, Curtis made another Canadian slasher film, *Terror Train*, which because of *Prom Night*'s success was also offered to Lynch. He turned it down, feeling that the premise of a slasher movie on a train didn't make sense. (*Terror Train* was instead directed by Roger Spotiswoode, who went on to a career helming Hollywood action films such as *Shoot to Kill*, *Air America* and Bond franchise entry *Tomorrow Never Dies*.)

"My theory was that you had to have a common ground. The high school was a common ground. But kids don't take trains. It's kind of phony," explains Lynch.

Prom Night's success resulted in three sequels (see reviews, p.29), albeit in name only, kick-starting one of Canada's most enduring horror franchises. But Lynch had no involvement with any of them, either.

"I wasn't much interested because they weren't anything that made any sense to me," he says. [Warning: spoilers] "Basically, what happened to Jamie Lee at the end of the film was that they would put her in a mental institution for a long time, as would happen to anybody. You've killed your own brother – who killed a bunch of your friends. You might kind of have a nervous breakdown. I didn't see any sequel, so when Peter [Simpson] came back with *Hello Mary Lou: Prom Night 2*, I thought, 'What's the point?' It really didn't do anything for me."

After *Prom Night*, Lynch made a couple more horror films, including 1982's *Humungous* (also written by Gray) and the 1986 TV movie *Mania* before moving on to a prolific career as a television series director, working on *Dark Shadows: The Revival*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and later incarnations of *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits*. More recently, he has returned to low-budget horror features with *Nightmare Carnival*, set for release later this year.

As far as the upcoming *Prom Night* remake goes (p.30), Lynch is surprised at the endurance of the slasher subgenre. He acknowledges that the climate for them has changed considerably since the heydays of pitching an entire horror movie on the strength of a poster alone. "The reason they were so prolific was because they were made for very little money. Now the studios themselves pump a fortune into them," he says with a laugh.

Although *Prom Night* is one of the better crafted, more interestingly shot and well-edited suspense yarns to come out of the Grisly White North, it certainly hasn't aged as well as other entries in the slasher canon. Featuring an unabashed '70s sensibility, notably the polyester fashions, infamous disco score (by prolific composer Paul Zaza, see left) and cheesy dance moves, the film doesn't hold up for younger audiences. Of course, for others, those are exactly the reasons it remains a minor classic – at least enough to warrant several DVD releases in the last few years.

Lynch remains surprisingly upfront about the little maple slasher that could. "Once you start examining this, you see that nothing is fresh, it's just a different take on something that's already been established. And there's nothing wrong with that, if the take is interesting."



RUE MORGUE DONS A THREADBARE, ILL-FITTING RENTAL TUXEDO FOR A LOOK BACK AT THE *PROM NIGHT* SEQUELS, WHICH AREN'T REALLY SEQUELS TO *PROM NIGHT* ANYWAY.



DREADFUL DATES

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

If you've never seen any of the *Prom Night* "sequels," Gentle Reader, the first thing you need to know is that they bear no resemblance to the original whatsoever. For that alone, let us be eternally grateful.

The Edmonton and Toronto-shot *Hello Mary Lou: Prom Night 2* (1987) originally had the decidedly non-franchise title *The Haunting of Hamilton High*, but the re-branding of the film as a would-be *Prom Night* sequel was a condition of producer Peter Simpson's distribution deal with the Samuel Goldwyn organization. Directed by Canadian TV veteran Bruce Pittman and scripted by Canuck B-horror stalwart Ron Oliver, the film is very much a child of its time (in the late '80s, the slasher film was dead and the post-*Elm Street* rubber-reality ghost story ruled the genre). We begin with a flashback to the senior prom of 1957 at Hamilton High, during which beautiful bad girl Mary Lou Maloney (Lisa Schrage, pictured) ditches her nerdy date Bill Nordham (Michael Ironside!) for hunky Buddy Cooper (future Stratford Festival Artistic Director Richard Monette). Devastated, Bill attempts revenge by tossing a stink bomb onto the stage as Mary Lou is being crowned prom queen – cue pivotal Prank Gone Awry™ horror plot device – and Mary Lou meets her fiery demise. Thirty years later, Bill Nordham is now the principal of Hamilton High and Buddy Cooper is a priest. It's the week of the senior prom, and Mary Lou's vengeful spirit returns to possess sweet, virginal Vicki (Wendy Lyon), whose boyfriend Craig (Justin Louis) happens to be the principal's son. Paranormal hijinks, gruesome carnage, wild hallucinations, sly satire and gratuitous nudity ensue.



In an ill-advised fit of pre-*Scream* postmodern fervor, Oliver named various characters Carpenter, Cooper, Henenlotter, Waters, Browning, Craven, Dante, O'Bannon, King, Romero, and Eddie Wood, but the self-reflexive horror craze was still about nine years away in '87, so let's cut the man some slack. His script is otherwise sharp, and the super-talented ensemble cast really clicks with the material. Lyon in particular has a field day as a near-comically good girl gone very comically bad, including locker room lesbianism, some icky incest and a protracted frontal nude scene – a sharp contrast to her best-known previous role as Prissy Andrews in *Anne of Green Gables*.



Natural[illegible]urns diminish in the subsequent entries, but both are still worthwhile. Mary Lou (this time Sherilyn Fenn look-alike Courtney Taylor) opts for a different tactic in the Toronto-lensed *Prom Night 3: Last Kiss* (1990), also scripted by Oliver, who co-directed with Peter Simpson. Instead of taking over another body, she takes over the life of high-school underachiever Alex Grey (Tim Conlon), plying him with sexual favours while turning him into an honour student and football star. The downside: anyone who stands in the way gets offed in spectacular and fitting fashion, and Alex is left to bury the bodies. Though lighter and more broadly comic than its predecessor, *Prom Night 3* doesn't skimp on gore, and as tired as we are of self-referential horror films, at least the homages here (including *The Evil Dead*, *Phantasm* and *Back to the Future*) are clever and slickly executed. And look, it's Canadian boxing legend George Chuvalo as a creepy biology teacher – sweet!

In *Prom Night 4: Deliver Us From Evil* (1992), the ghost story/rubber reality conceit is ditched in favour of a demonic possession/stalk 'n' slash hybrid, and a much darker tone. James Carver plays a "possessed" priest (or is he just plain nuts?) who escapes from his church minders and goes on a murderous rampage, targeting "sinners" (i.e. people who are either having sex or are seriously considering it). He eventually zeroes in on two teen couples who ditch the senior prom (thereby nixing the need for expensive crowd scenes) and head for a stately rural home to drink and, yes, have sex. Budgetary constraints are sometimes painfully evident in director Boris Clay's installment (like, uh, why is it snowing on prom night?), but the suspense is palpable and the kill scenes often inventively gruesome.

The franchise might have fallen silent for fifteen years now, but if you're not hearing "Stairway to Heaven," it's clearly not the last dance of the night.



CAN AN IN-NAME-ONLY, PG-13 *PROM NIGHT* REMAKE DO ITS HORROR HERITAGE PROUD? DIRECTOR NELSON McCORMICK SAYS "YES."

CLASS DISMISSED!

BY JAMES BURRELL

First of all, let's clarify one thing: the new theatrical release of *Prom Night* – due to hit screens April 11 – has nothing to do with the 1980 cult classic that saw Jamie Lee Curtis cutting some mean moves on the dance floor.

"It's a brand-new experience and the only thing they both have in common is the title," confirms the new *Prom*'s director, Nelson McCormick. The veteran of numerous television dramas, including *Prison Break*, *CSI*, *ER* and *NYPD Blue*, McCormick says there was some initial concern on the part of Sony Pictures/Screen Gems about using the title of the beloved cult film. But studio reasoning decreed that the majority of this *Prom Night*'s targeted teen audience would have little or no knowledge of the prior versions, and therefore a new plot could be introduced without backlash from fans.

"The thinking on the part of the marketing and studio minds was that, truthfully, a sixteen-year-old going to see this film today wasn't even alive in 1980 when the original was made," McCormick says. "And the reality is, how many of those who saw the original are going to be part of this film's core audience? It's going to be minimal at best."

In the slasher tradition of minimal plotting, this new version, which takes place at a posh hotel, features a homicidal teacher slicing his way through the partying Bridgeport High Senior Class of 2008 – all to get to a former student (played by Brittany Snow) with whom he's developed a particularly unhealthy obsession.

McCormick says the high school prom – a seminal rite of passage for many North American youth – is a natural setting for a horror film, and one that prompted him to see what intriguing ideas he could come up with.

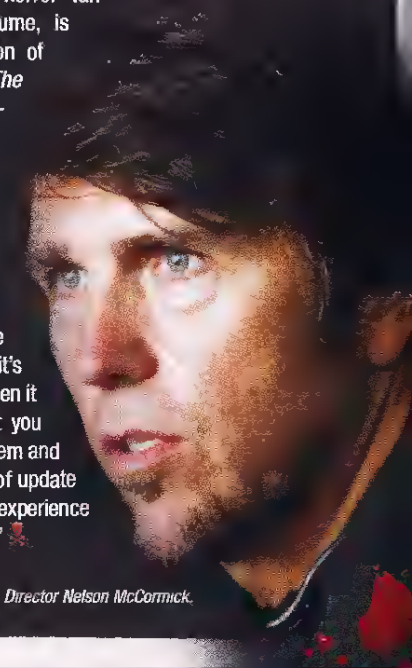
"The prom is thematically linked to horror films in the sense that it's the end of innocence, it's the death of youth, it's the last night you're allowed to be a kid, and so I just wanted to kind of embrace that and use that because there is also a sense of bittersweetness at the prom that creates a sense of the unknown, and out of that, a sense of fear."

Proof of the film's teen target audience lies in the fact that *Prom Night* will be released with a PG-13 rating – a source of contention for some fans. The horror-lite certification isn't lost on McCormick, though, who says that by utilizing inventive camera work and editing, he was still able to achieve a palpable sense of fear without ample gore.

"[I felt] I'm going to have to play the 'less is more' game. I'm going to have to shoot this in such a way that you imagine the worst kind of imagery I can show you. And I think I was honestly able to shoot it in a way that makes it even creepier, even more disturbing. . . . There's a lot of things we can depict while doing it in an artful way that is going to be more successful."

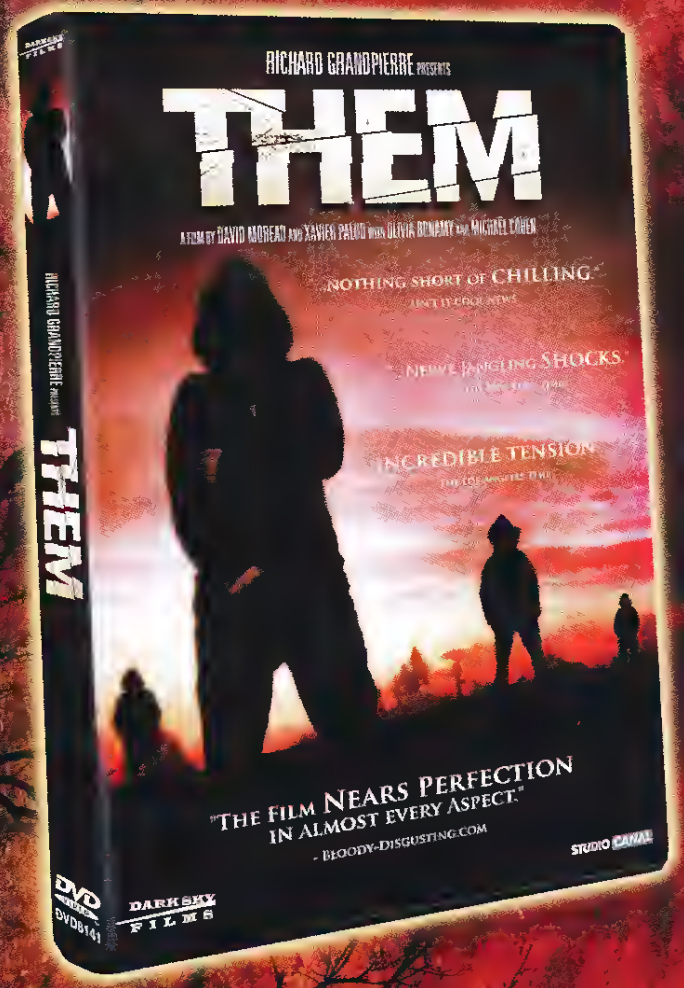
Prom Night is just the first of two projects that McCormick, a self-confessed horror fan despite his lacking genre resume, is working on. His updated version of another '80s horror classic, *The Stepfather*, is currently in production.

Although seasoned horror fans may roll their eyes, McCormick defends the remake trend: "The best reason to remake a film is if it feels relevant and connects with people and matters and means something today. In the case of *The Stepfather*, I think it's even more relevant today than when it came out. With some films that you admire so much, you can go to them and say, 'Wouldn't it be great to sort of update this and have today's audience experience what I did when I saw this film?'"



Director Nelson McCormick.

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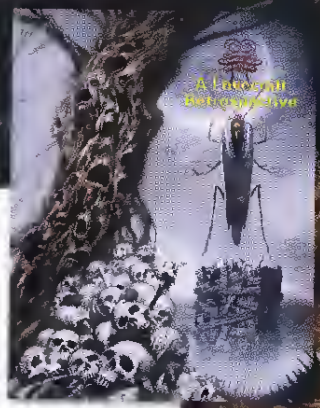


A LOVECRAFT RETROSPECTIVE COLLECTS 85 YEARS OF ART INFLUENCED BY THE DARK PRINCE OF PROVIDENCE.

ILLUSTRATING THE INDESCRIBABLE

by Monica S. Kuebler







"Lovecraft's work has always cried out to be illustrated," writes director and frequent Lovecraft adapter Stuart Gordon (*From Beyond*, *Re-Animator*) in his preface to ***A Lovecraft Retrospective***, a new coffee-table crusher of a book that celebrates the wide and varied works of art inspired by the unspeakable horrors, tentacled beasties, strange locales and indescribable Old Ones that haunt the author's tales. Covering 85 years of Lovecraftian illustration, the 12 x 15.5-inch book not only celebrates and faithfully reproduces the best artistic imaginings, it also takes stock of lesser and lesser-known works and their own importance to the author's literary legacy.

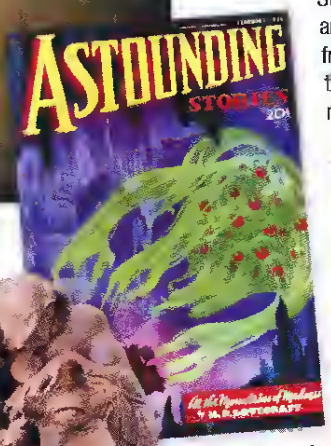
"I wanted a retrospective from the earliest art to the present day," explains Jerad Walters, Centipede Press owner and the book's editor. "I wanted people to have a book where they could see just about everything ever done, from the hack work in the pulps to the paperback covers of the 1960s to the fanzines and then the serious professional work."

Most of *A Lovecraft Retrospective*'s 400 pages and 30 two-page foldouts are dedicated to glorious full-colour (where applicable) reproductions of the artwork. The pieces within include H.R. Giger's Necronom IV, featuring his now-famous bio-mechanical, phallus-headed alien, Derek Rigg's Lovecraft-inspired artwork for Iron Maiden's *Life After Death* (of which only a portion appeared on the final album cover), large reproductions of Pooch's colourful and cartoonishly lowbrow Costume of Cthulhu and Tunnel of Lovecraft; as well as a complete black and white reproduction of EC Comics' adaptation of "The Witch's Dungeon." The book also

Lurid Lovecraft Art: *(clockwise from top) Necronom IV by H R Giger, Miskatonic by Pooch,* ***A Lovecraft Retrospective*** *cover featuring Michael Whelan's Lovecraft Diptych and (opposite) The Thing On The Rooftop by Mike Mignola*









Banquet Of Beasts: *(clockwise from top left) Demon Portrait II by Bill Hand In The Deep Swamp by Patrick Byers, Necronomicon sculpture by Joel Harlow and* ***Astounding Stories*** *cover with illustration by Howard V Brown*

houses sections on such genre heavy hitters as Bernie Wrightson, Michael Whelan, Les Edwards, J.K. Potter and Bob Eggleton, interspersed with short essays on the historical importance of the paintings and sketches found within. These succinct but informative write-ups by Stefan Dziemianowicz, a highly respected horror, sci-fi and pulp historian, trace the evolution of Lovecraftian art from its earliest roots in the interior line drawing illustrations of the pulps (including the art of Virgil Finlay) to more recent interpretations.

Interestingly, when Walters first embarked on the project, he envisioned a much smaller book containing both artwork and fiction – one that would be part of an upcoming H.P. Lovecraft volume in his company's *Masters of the Weird Tale* series.

"[The scope] changed when I realized just how much great art was out there," says Walters. "So I thought it would be great just to assemble an art volume and make something so tremendous you'd just look at it and say 'Whoa! Where the fuck did that come from?!'"

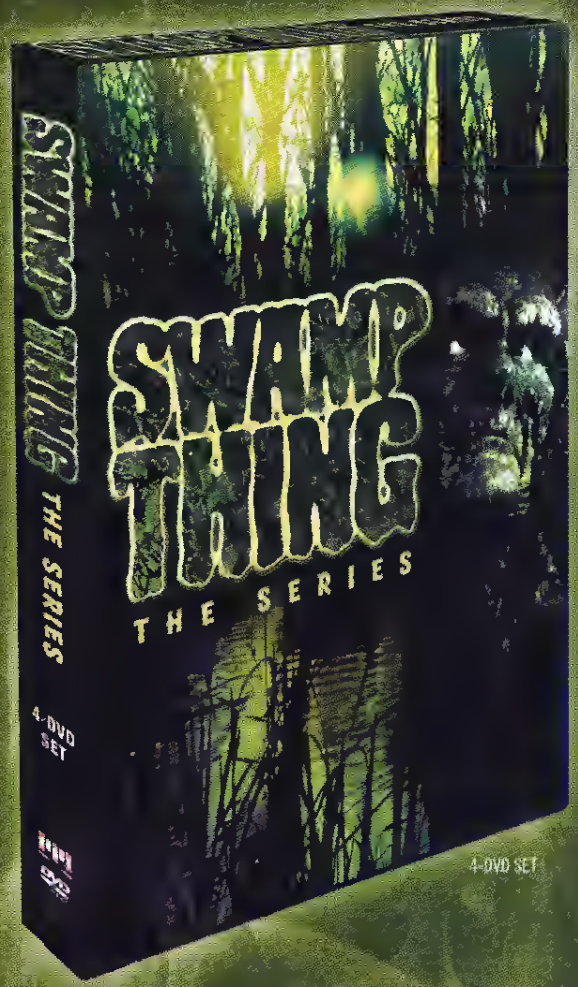
Though Walters confesses that tracking down some of the copyright holders proved difficult, ultimately everyone was happy to have their works represented in the book (available from centipedepress.com in three formats: a cloth-bound, slipcased edition for $395, a 150-copy cloth-bound, traycased edition for $495, and a deluxe, leatherbound traycase edition signed by nearly every living contributor for $2495). But Walters served as more than just the book's editor and compiler, he also did 95% of the scanning and colour correction work himself.

"Most of the works have been scanned from either originals or first generation transparencies, and the quality of the reproductions is second to none," he explains. "We also travelled around the United States finding original colour works and comparing our proofs with the originals, so many of the works have never seen such accurate colour reproduction. Some of the works, such as Michael Whelan's Lovecraft Diptych, are reproduced nearly actual size. Others have detail views. Some major works have never before been published."

Of these, the most notable are an original work from the aforementioned award-winning artist Michael Whelan, another from popular genre illustrator Harry O. Morris and two previously unpublished works by Arkham House cover artist Raymond Bayless.

As Harlan Ellison says in his introduction, "this is a book that insists on involvement," and it does. It practically begs to be picked up, flipped through, examined and studied at length. "It is not an icon," Ellison continues, "it is a happening. Let it happen to you."

From DC to TV to DVD...
There's No Telling How Far
A Good Wrath Will Take
SWAMP THING

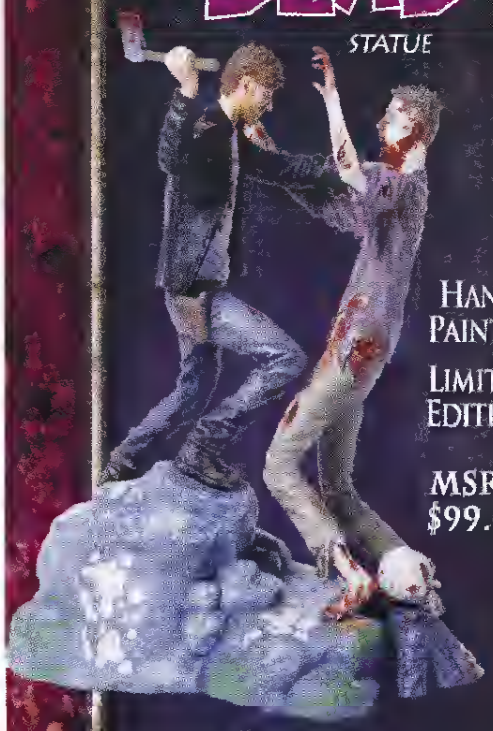


Emerging from the bayous of Louisiana, *Swamp Thing* is bringing his wrath to DVD–in a box set worthy of the DC legend and his legion of fans. Clocking in at four discs, *Swamp Thing: The Series* boasts the first 22 episodes of the dearly departed early-'90s TV series in the order they were meant to be seen, plus exclusive interviews with co-creator Len Wein and actor Dick Durock, and a whole lot more.

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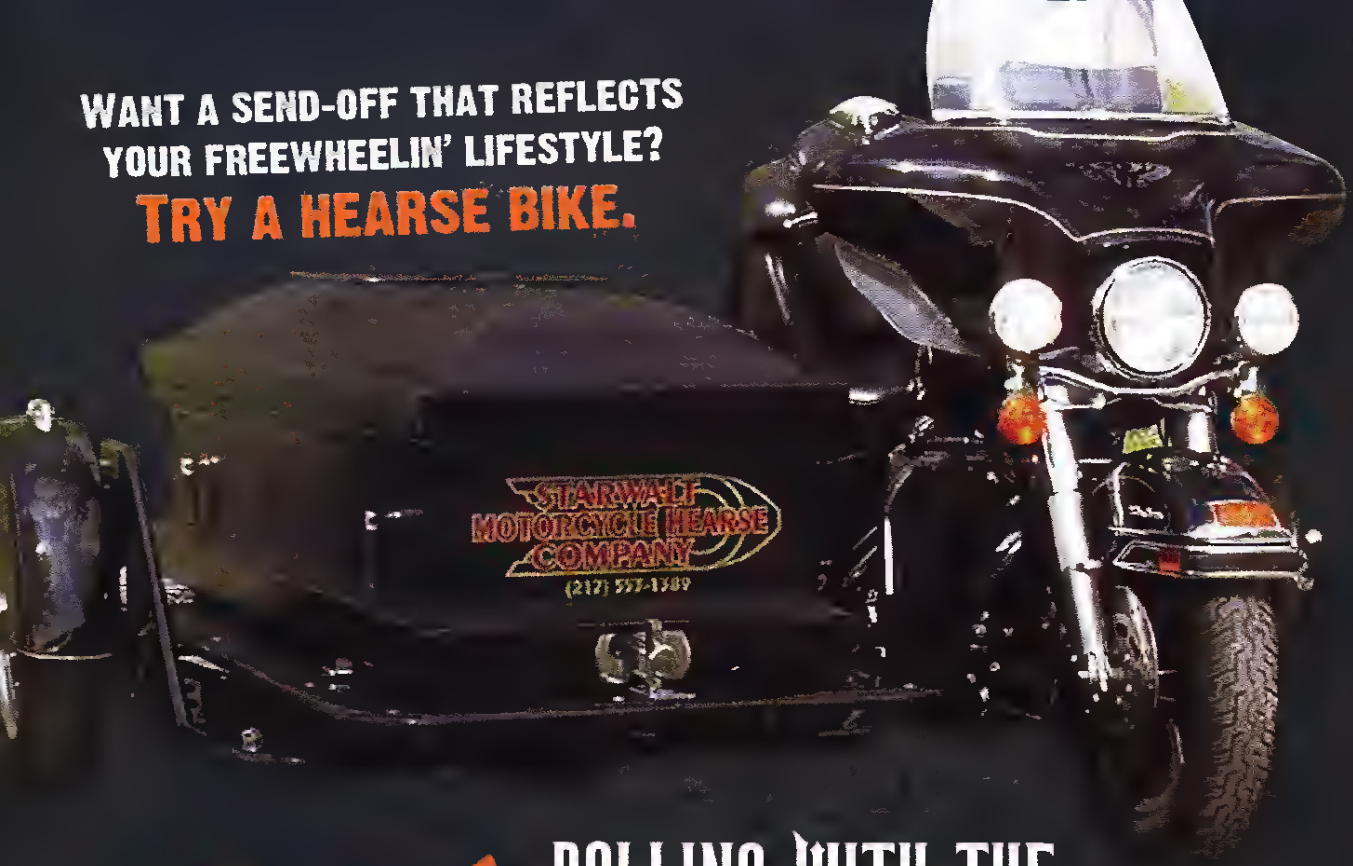
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ROLLING WITH THE Reaper

BY LAST CHANCE LANCE

"Faster, faster, faster, until the thrill of speed overcomes the fear of death."
Hunter S. Thompson

Traditionally, the vehicle that delivers one's remains to the graveyard is a big, boxy hearse. But if you are a motorcycle enthusiast, one last ride on the open road is the only way to go.

Hearse bikes didn't start out as a sleek alternative to death cabs, though. Their history dates back to World War II, when the sidecar on a Norton motorcycle was removed and replaced with a flatbed for a coffin or stretcher and used to transport casualties or the deceased off the battlefield.

Though many different versions appeared over the years, its first practical application as a funerary vehicle was developed in England and Australia shortly after the war, where it was used by families who couldn't afford the luxury of a motor vehicle in the funeral service. These first examples were far from fancy, as the coffin was usually strapped down to a flatbed where the sidecar used to be and was completely exposed or covered with a tarp to protect it from the elements.

Over the years, the number of motorcycle clubs in the UK steadily rose to include casual riders, serious racers and bike gangs, as well as military and police personnel who served in bike units. Though the old-style motorcycle hearse was in use in some places, it wasn't until the 1990s that it really – pun intend-



Death Cabs for Rebels: *(from left to right) 2002 Harley Davidson Road King Classic with Sidecar from the Black Velvet Motorcycle Hearse Company of Santa Ana, California; Suzuki Hayabusa from Motorcycle Funerals Ltd. UK; 2002 Harley Davidson Road King Classic Trike Conversion with Coffin Carriage from Tombstone Hearse Company of Texas (below and left) 1991 Harley Davidson Ultra Classic with Casket Platform from the Starwalt Motorcycle Hearse Company of St. Louis, Missouri*

ed – took off, as bike owners began requesting the option of using one in their funeral service. To meet the demand, different configurations emerged in an attempt to bring more dignity to the service. Then, in 2002, British company Motorcycle Hearses Limited offered a completely enclosed coffin platform – necessary mainly due to the country's inclement weather. Soon, funeral homes throughout the UK added the motorcycle hearse as an option, offering different design packages developed to be as individual as the deceased rider.

For example, the British Triumph motorcycle hearse comes complete with Rolls Royce hearse fittings to make that final ride as dignified, and English, as possible. The black leather interior has even been fitted with lighting, a de-mister and temperature controls, as well as a rack to display any artifacts that you may wish to have buried along with you.

The Harley Davidson option, on the other hand, is designed to reflect a freewheeling spirit and is attached to the bike with an engine loud enough to ensure that all of the angels in heaven (or demons in hell) know that you're on the way.

But for riders with an overwhelming need for speed, the Suzuki Hayabusa is the consummate coffin rocket. Having broken the world's record in 2004 as the fastest motorcycle hearse in production, it'll get you to the graveyard while smashing the speed limit. (In fact, Reverend Paul Sinclair, owner of Motorcycle Funerals, boasts, "The Hayabusa Hearse will get you to the crematorium faster than anybody else – or your money back!")

Motorcycle hearses are becoming more widely accepted in North America as well, but in a much different configuration. Whereas companies in England and Australia have been refitting sidecars into coffin platforms, most motorcycle hearse companies in the US, such as Pennsylvania's Tombstone Hearse Company (tombstonehearse.com), have been building coffin trailers inspired by 19th-century horse-drawn funeral carriages and equipping them to be pulled by V-twin powered Harley Davidson trikes (three-wheeled motorcycles that do not have sidecars), which are in a class all by themselves.

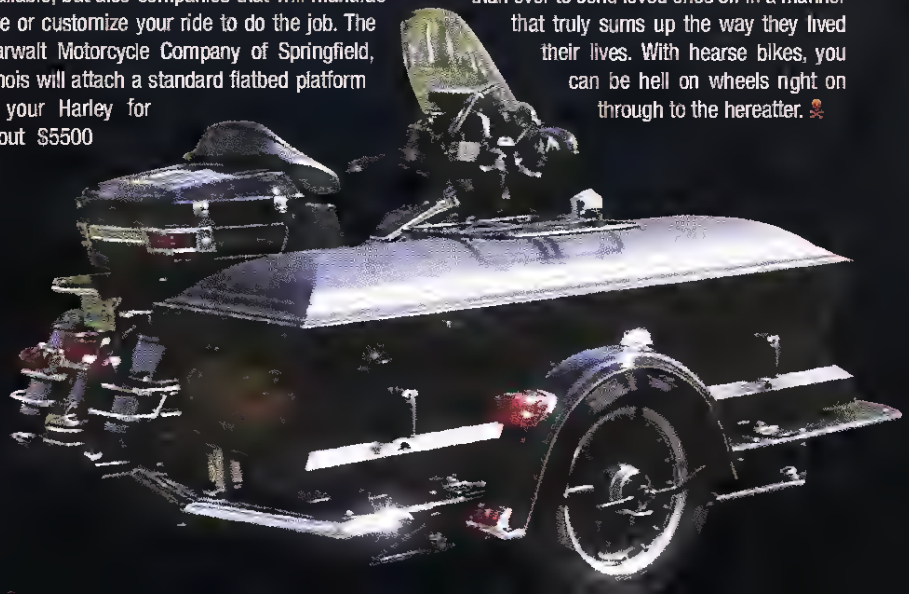
The Black Velvet Motorcycle Hearse Company in Santa Ana, California (blackvelvethearse.com) also features the same type of coffin carriage, but instead of pulling with a trike, it utilizes a 2002 Harley Davidson Road King with a sidecar so that the bereaved widow can accompany the coffin to its final destination.

A casual glance online reveals not only a growing number of funeral homes that have the option available, but also companies that will manufacture or customize your ride to do the job. The Starwalt Motorcycle Company of Springfield, Illinois will attach a standard flatbed platform to your Harley for about $5500 USD, and also offers a deluxe hydraulic lift package to raise and lower the coffin that starts at $14,000.

However, if you're leaning more towards the Old West look of the carriage configuration – Black Diamond Motorcycle Hearse Service of Texas offers two-wheeled coffin carriage trailers that will set you back about $12,000.

Arrangements for the use of a motorcycle hearse are generally made through whichever funeral home you choose and may not always be available in your area. Though costs vary depending on the scale of your service, rental rates with driver generally start at about $400 and may have an extra mileage charge tacked on, depending how far the rider has to go.

As funerals continue to evolve and become less about the meditation of death and more about the celebration of life, there are more opportunities than ever to send loved ones off in a manner that truly sums up the way they lived their lives. With hearse bikes, you can be hell on wheels right on through to the hereafter.





Film, Video, Dvd & Reissues

CINEMACABRE



Cloverfield: Rob (Michael Stahl-David) and Beth (Odette Yustman) record themselves while under attack.

STOMPING GROUNDS

CLOVERFIELD

Starring Mike Vogel, Michael Stahl-David and Odette Yustman
Directed by Matt Reeves
Written by Drew Goddard
Paramount

Thanks to *The Day After Tomorrow*, Peter Jackson's *King Kong*, *I Am Legend*, *Mulberry Street* and even *Transformers*, the Big Apple has suffered some serious bruises in the movies as of late. *Cloverfield*, however, turns it into apple sauce.

Amazingly, the closely guarded monster movie from producer J.J. Abrams (creator of TV show *Lost*) lives up to the gargantuan hype, with a concept that's time has come. Essentially *The Blair Witch Project* meets *Godzilla*, it's the first-person account of a handful of twentysomethings trying to survive – and rescue a trapped friend who's more than a friend to one of them – on the night a giant thing crawls out of the ocean to destroy NYC. One of them captures it all on hand-held video, recovered later by the Department of Defense. They're a TV-pretty bunch, and given the awfulness constantly exploding (and crawling) around them, it's a stretch to believe they'd act so suicidal, or be so jokey, but if you think that's a deal breaker, you should probably be reading Nitpickers Quarterly, because, claws down, *Cloverfield* is a block-levelling blast.

Fifteen years after *Jurassic Park*, a decade past Roland Emmerich's idiotic *Godzilla* remake and nine years following *The Blair Witch Project*, Abrams, writer Drew Goddard and director Matt Reeves figured things out. Firstly, just because CGI can vividly bring to life giant creatures, doesn't mean you should train the camera on them until the mystery dissipates. *Cloverfield* shows us its monster sparingly and gradually; it genuinely feels like an unknowable horror.

Secondly, less is more extends to narrative. We don't know where this thing came from, what it wants or what it really is. Fear resides in the great unknown – and here it rages.

Thirdly, the raw immediacy of home video has saturated our culture enough that it's a given someone would endanger themselves to film a tragedy and we would want to watch it. While *Cloverfield*'s swirling camera can induce nausea, it also pushes the escalating horrors right into your face and holds them there.

Lastly, there is no substitute for real-life horror. The movie paraphrases man-in-the-street footage from 9/11 (i.e. a dust cloud rounding a street corner) to chilling effect. Watching it, one understands how the original, more serious version of *Godzilla* must've nailed post-war Japanese audiences.

It all amounts to a monster movie that's not a "monster movie." The behemoth isn't named, there's no rubber suit and we see people die. *Cloverfield* is a new breed of creature carnage. Time to move out of Manhattan, folks.

Dave Alexander

THE LAST PRINCE OF BEL-AIR

I AM LEGEND

Starring Will Smith, Alice Braga and Dash Mihok
Directed by Francis Lawrence
Written by Mark Protosevich and Akiva Goldsman
Warner Bros.

The last man on Earth is a douchebag. And not just because he's played by Hollywood one-liner machine Will Smith, star of such douche-y productions as *Independence Day*, *Wild Wild West* and *The Legend of* (Douche) *Bagger Vance*. Nope, the Robert Neville character in this adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel was written as a douchebag.



This Neville claims that Bob Marley's *Legend* ("Legend" – get it?) is the greatest album ever recorded (it was compiled, dummy). There's nothing wrong with old Bob but here he represents a cool "ethnic" artist that doesn't offend Middle America. Worse, Neville's favourite movie, which he can recite word for word, is *Shrek*. If you're older than twelve and your favourite movie is *Shrek*, you're a douchebag. This third adaptation of *I Am Legend* is, ironically, as whitebread as its hero.

Director Francis Lawrence (*Constantine*) strays further from the 1954 source material than both 1964's *The Last Man on Earth*,

starring Vincent Price, and the 1971 Charleton Heston vehicle *The Omega Man* (Chuck Heston getting busy with afro-Queen Rosalind Cash while fighting albino religious zealots, *that* was radical!) – another remake starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, with Ridley Scott directing, fell through.

This time there are no "still living," no former neighbours taunting an everyman Neville and nothing to make him question his role in this new world. Smith plays an army scientist immune to a cancer cure gone wrong that's killed most of the world and turned the rest of it into evil vampires. He races around the decaying streets of Manhattan with his dog; hunting deer, borrowing videos from a store full of mannequins and searching for a cure, always mindful to return to his fortified walk-up (the same one he lived at with his wife and child before they died) before sundown, when the bloodsuckers appear.

Chalk it up to the popularity of zombie movies – these seemingly mindless ghouls aren't interested in forming cults, they simply want blood. Strangely, though, while *Legend*'s abandoned NYC looks awesomely authentic, the vampires are needlessly and poorly animated, like refugees from a Sci-Fi Channel flick.

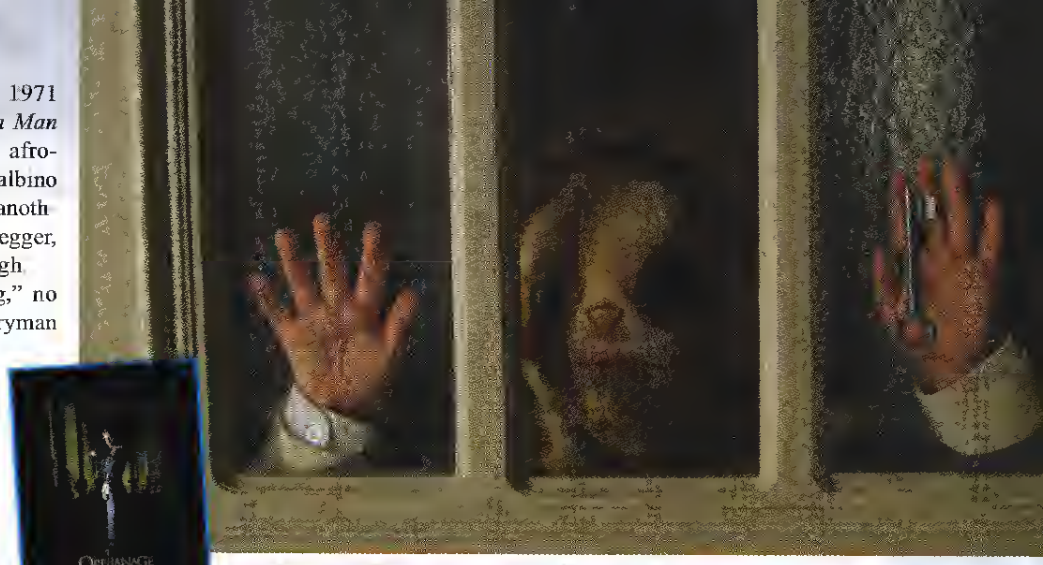
Although it is occasionally suspenseful and horrific (e.g. the wayward mannequin scene), *I Am Legend* completely misses the point of Matheson's revolutionary genre deconstruction. Here, the poorly paced, illogical climax affirms just who this toothless movie is for. According to the film, utopia lies behind the walls of a gated community in Middle America – presumably one with a Wal-Mart that sells Bob Marley's *Legend* and all those douche-drenched *Shrek* movies.

Dave Alexander

DEL TORO'S OFFSPRING

THE ORPHANAGE

Starring Belén Rueda, Fernando Cayo and Roger Princep
Directed by Juan Antonio Bayona
Written by Sergio G. Sánchez
Christal Films



A stylish and chilling ghost story in the vein of ***The Devil's Backbone***

What we fear changes with age. The boogeyman hiding in our closet as a child is eventually replaced by a sickle-wielding Grim Reaper when we enter old age. In between, for parents anyway, there is no greater fear than losing a child, and Spanish director Juan Antonio Bayona's *The Orphanage* evokes that terrible possibility with equal parts grace and foreboding.

Star Belén Rueda plays Laura, a middle-aged woman who reopens the orphanage where she grew up as a home for special needs children. As preparations for the opening get underway, Laura and her husband Carlos (Fernando Cayo) notice that their adopted son Simón (Roger Princep) has some new imaginary friends. But these friends aren't entirely benign, nor are they entirely imaginary – a revelation Laura doesn't come to until Simón disappears. That the orphanage hides terrible secrets which only come to light in the film's final reel will not come as a surprise to any ghost story fan. What will, though, is how well this stylishly shot thriller balances credible characterization with genuine chills and an ending which manages to be incredibly tragic but right.

Bayona has obviously studied his producer Guillermo del Toro's oeuvre closely. He evokes both the discrete thrills of del Toro's own ghost story, *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), and the more disturbing parent-child bonds of *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006). Little blood is spilled but Bayona knows his way around a set piece – pay special attention to the masquerade party that leads to Simón's disappearance. Credit must also go to writer Sergio G. Sánchez, who shows Laura as both a playful accomplice to her son's whims and a frustrated mother who sometimes deals with his tantrums with a smack. The complex portrayal will make any parent cringe.

The distributor's decision to release the film just days after Christmas may seem perverse, but *The Orphanage* is, in its way, as strong a family film as *It's a Wonderful Life*, exemplifying as it does the lengths to which a mother will go to protect her child. Consider this highly recommended for those whose perfect holiday includes annual helpings of turkey and *The Exorcist*.

Sean Plummer

DON'T MESS WITH MIIKE

ONE MISSED CALL

Starring Shannyn Sossamon, Ed Burns and Ana Claudia Talancón
Directed by Eric Valette
Written by Andrew Klavan
Warner Bros.

Is it any surprise that *One Missed Call*, Hollywood's first Asian horror remake of 2008, is missing anything resembling chills or thrills? Based on the 2003 Takashi Miike film, it's a lifeless horror show which – pardon the pun – appears to have been phoned in.



Shannyn Sossamon (*A Knight's Tale*) stars as Beth Raymond, a university student whose friends are dropping all around her. Before their deaths, the victims receive a cellphone call from themselves, dated days in the future. If that's not scary enough – and it's not – the message is a recording of their final moments. Figuring her own death call is imminent, Beth teams with Detective Jack Andrews (Ed Burns) to find out who or what is responsible for the gruesome goings-on and stop it before it claims her life.

Where to begin... first, you have a Japanese film being remade by a Frenchman making his American debut. To say something was lost in translation would be an understatement. Director Eric Valette made a small splash a few years ago with the claustrophobic prison shocker *Maléfique* (2002), but *One Missed Call* displays no sense of a foreign talent taking on Hollywood conventions à la Fritz Lang or Paul Verhoeven. Indeed, Valette's reliance on a bland but attractive



NO HATCHET JOB

SPIRAL

Starring Joel David Moore, Amber Tamblyn and Zachary Levi
Directed by Adam Green and Joel David Moore
Written by Joel Danial Boreing and Joel David Moore
Anchor Bay

It's not easy to evoke sympathy for a killer. Admiration, sure. We all cheer Dr. Chilton's comeuppance at the hands (and teeth) of Hannibal Lecter. Pity? Of course. Think about poor mother-smothered Norman Bates. But genuine sympathy? That's harder to muster given the crime's heinousness. Yet co-directors Adam Green and Joel David Moore almost do it in *Spiral*, Green's follow-up to his old school slasher entry *Hatchet*.



Moore (who also co-wrote this film and starred in *Hatchet*) plays Mason, a sad-sack office drone who fills his lonely hours with jazz and art. At work, he sells insurance by phone and eats lunch by himself; at home he paints portraits of women. Mason is damaged goods – shy, socially inept, with vast reserves of rage roiling beneath his psyche's surface.

But hope for a normal life arrives in the form of Amber (Amber Tamblyn), a sweet co-worker who (somewhat unbelievably) takes a liking to Mason. They become more than friends and Amber is soon posing for the would-be artist. She soon discovers evidence, however, that her boyfriend's mysterious side hides something sinister.

Tonally, *Spiral* is a complete departure from *Hatchet*. Where that film was an unapologetic gorefest, *Spiral* ratchets up the tension without spilling a single drop of blood (probably; the twist ending is admirably ambiguous). Instead, it relies on mood, sound design and strong performances, especially by Moore, who conveys his character's absolute discomfort with life in every word and gesture.

If *Spiral* has a weakness, it is Mason's somewhat unbelievable pathology. Of course he suffered a childhood tragedy, but is it enough to justify his wreck of a life? Overlook that, though, and *Spiral* is a well-crafted thriller whose horror comes not from what we see happening behind Mason's closed bathroom door but from what we imagine is happening in his closed-off world.

Sean Plummer

young cast, jump-scares and CGI gimmickry places him firmly within the same studio system that thought remaking *Halloween* was a good idea.

More importantly, the film's central device – haunted cellphones – is just not very frightening. Indeed, it was Takashi Miike's particular brand of insanity which elevated the original *One Missed Call* into the realm of genuine creepiness. The original's two major set pieces – a TV exorcism turned deadly and a showdown with a ghost in an abandoned hospital – are both recreated here to diminished effect. (Note to Hollywood: remake Miike at your own peril.)

Here's hoping 2008's other Asian fright flick remakes, *The Eye*, *A Tale of Two Sisters* and *Shutter*, don't miss the mark as badly.

Sean Plummer

MORE SOSSAMON SUCKAGE

CATACOMBS

Starring Shannyn Sossamon, Alecia Moore and Cabral Ibacka
Written and directed by Tomm Coker and David Elliot
Maple

It's fairly early into 2008 and, granted, I haven't seen the *Day of the Dead* remake yet, but it's hard to imagine that there will be a worse horror film released this year than *Catacombs*. The latest crudity served up by Twisted Pictures – the production company behind the *Saw* series – may have been a fantastic make-work project for the Romanian film industry. But for moviegoers it's another strike against the company also responsible for *Dead Silence*.

Catacomb's writing/directing team of Tomm Coker and David Elliot think that taking the most tired of premises – masked guy chases lost, nubile woman – and setting it in an exotic location makes for an original story. Even if the movie had been shot in the actual sub-Parisian catacombs and not some grubby Eastern European service tunnels littered with a few plastic skulls, there's still no getting past the absence of plot.



Shannyn Sossamon, playing fast and loose with her career (this and the *One Missed Call* remake!), stars as unlikable whiner Victoria, a mono-dimensional prude who travels to "Paris" after receiving an invite from her sister Carolyn (Alecia Moore, a.k.a pop star Pink, who does an alright job in her first real movie role). They go to an illegal underground rave, get high and meet some of the pretentious dinkoids behind the event. When the cops raid the catacombs, everyone scatters, Carolyn is attacked by a masked madman – said to be raised by brutal Satanists – and Victoria spends the rest of the movie wandering dark tunnels, occasionally running from a big buffoon of a bad guy.

It's a nearly bloodless affair shot through with idiotic dialogue spoken by idiot characters. The only redeeming quality is a twist ending so operatically dumb, it's entertaining in a "did that really just happen?" kinda way.

As for how such an inept film got made in the first place, I'm guessing *Catacombs* is actually some kind of a clever financial ruse for the folks at Twisted to hide all that *Saw* dough.

Oh yes, there will tax dodges…

Dave Alexander

HYBRID MOMENTS

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR: REQUIEM

Starring Steven Pasquale, John Ortiz and Reiko Aylesworth
Directed by Colin and Greg Strause
Written by Shane Salerno
Fox





Aliens vs. Predator: Requiem: *The hybrid monster is a special effects highlight*

Remember when the *Alien* and *Predator* movies were the shit? Remember how exciting the prospect of *Alien vs. Predator* was? Remember how that movie sucked, and almost single-handedly nailed the coffin closed for both franchises? Keeping that in mind, one goes into a screening of *Aliens vs. Predator: Requiem* with more than a little apprehension.

It picks up where the original *AVP* left off, with the Predator ship leaving Earth and the Alien-Predator hybrid bursting out of the dead Predator's chest. From there it goes on a killing spree, forcing the ship to crash-land somewhere in the Colorado mountains, where it spews its cargo of alien facehuggers. A Predator "cleaner" arrives shortly after to hunt down the aliens, which are multiplying rapidly as they prey on the local townies.

Though it hits the ground running, *Requiem* soon flips between frenetic, action-packed fight scenes and a formulaic horror story centring around a group of clichéd nobodies who look like they walked out of a subpar slasher flick. It's not a complete write-off, though, as it does feature some top-notch special effects and a terrific score by Brian Tyler (*Bubba Ho-Tep*). The creature costumes are awesome, hearkening back to the original *Predator* and *Alien* designs, and the PredAlien hybrid is quite original and exceptionally menacing [*sez you, Lance - Ed*]. It also scores big for never shying away from the blood and gore, and offers a few truly disturbing scenes, including the depiction of a child killed by a chestburster and the hybrid's visit to a maternity ward (in order to plant its offspring).

Overall, this feature debut from the Strause brothers is entertaining despite its many flaws and – as evidenced by the more than $100 million it's earned worldwide – is, at the very least, keeping the hybrid franchise on life support.

Last Chance Lance

ENTER THE STABBIN' CABIN

THE BLOOD SHED

Starring Alan Rowe Kelly, Terry M. West and Joshua Nelson
Written and directed by Alan Rowe Kelly
Heretic

Missing persons reports are piling up right where the backwoods meets suburbia, and the townsfolk accurately suspect the abhorrent Bullion clan have something to do with it. Led by proud Papa Elvis, the brain-dead Bullions – brothers Butternut and Hubcap, hanger-on Sno Cakes and their "little sister" Beefteena (played by writer/director Alan Rowe Kelly, who reportedly gained 50 pounds to fill out the role, in Shirley Temple drag) – have killed off a few too many "townies" lately, violating their father's first rule: "strangers are tops but neighbours bring cops." A vile and revolting romp of deviant death dished out by hillbilly swine follows, as people start poking around the inbred cannibal family's non-negotiable way of life. Building to a wicked birthday party crescendo to which most of the guests didn't know they were invited, the reprehensible constitution of *The Blood Shed* will have you rolling in the aisles – albeit dirty, sticky ones where the three-second rule certainly wouldn't apply.

The gene pool of this comedic cult horror flick may be tainted but the talent pool certainly isn't. Despite a rough presentation, the directing, acting, set decoration and costuming of this movie one-ups Rob Zombie's *House of 1000 Corpses* with probably one percent of the budget. Even with the thin plotting and admittedly fewer torture scenes, *The Blood Shed* makes more sense than Zombie's similarly themed, bloody messcapade and it's just plain-out more fun. Kelly's crew knows the devil is in the details and it's a concept that comes through laughingly loud and clear in the sublime performances and stomping ground they created for the rollicking, cantankerous Bullions. That isn't to say the family never gets down to business. When Beefteena's not getting felt up by her kinfolk, she's an old hand with the gardening shears, and one scene involving a pair of pliers and a crucified cop makes darn sure cherry tomatoes will never taste the same again.

There's an allure in using your limitations to your advantage and coming from an honest place to contribute to a genre that you





A low-budget hillbilly horror that outdoes ***House of 1000 Corpses***

obviously adore. As Papa Elvis says, "What happens in the shed, stays in the shed."

Trevor Tuminski

MORE LIKE "FLACCID"

LAKE PLACID 2

Starring John Schneider, Sarah Lafleur and Chad Collins
Directed by David Flores
Written by Todd Hurvitz, Howie Miller and David E. Kelley
Fox

Just in case you missed the original *Lake Placid*, which hit theatres back in the summer of 1999, it was about a gigantic crocodile that was munching on the local tourist trade of a lakeside town in backwater Maine. And if you watched the movie right to the end you would have seen four little baby crocs swimming in the water just as the credits rolled.



Eight years later, those baby crocs are all grown up and start attacking anyone who sets foot in the water. It's up to the new sheriff (John Schneider: Bo from TV's *The Dukes of Hazzard*), who teams up with an obnoxious big game hunter and a sexy game warden, to either defeat the crocs or get chomped.

Other than the crocs, the only connection to the original movie is psychotic Sadie Bickerman, sister of Betty White's hilarious Delores character, played by 81-year-old Cloris Leachman. Turns out that, like her sister, she's been feeding the crocs a growth hormone and helping them feed on anyone who threatens their existence.

Shot in Bulgaria for the Sci-Fi Channel, it could have been a semi-cool movie, except for the fact that it suffers from CGI effects so outrageously bad that I almost felt ashamed to be a horror movie fan while watching it. Director David Flores is apparently trying to become the Uwe Boll of giant animal movies, as he was also behind the godawful *Boa vs. Python*.

The best part about the DVD is that if you only have nine minutes to waste, there's a "gnawed up" version in the extras that fast forwards right to the topless babe and gory, croc-chomping scenes. Check it out before committing to the entire movie – you can thank me later.

Last Chance Lance

POSTMODERN COMPOST

HACK!

Starring Danica McKellar, Sean Kanan and Juliet Landau
Written and directed by Matt Flynn
Allumination Filmworks

It is early in the year as I write this, but I'm already convinced that I've just seen the worst horror film of 2008. No, really, if I have to sit through a worse one before December, I will kill myself and take at least one editor with me [*best avoid* Catacombs *then, John -Ed*].

At one point, postmodern horror cinema was da bomb. That point was about eleven years ago, but – if I may quote *Aliens*, 'cause that'd be, like, all postmodern and shit – apparently writer/director Matt Flynn hasn't been keeping up on current events. In a set-up that would give Kevin Williamson (*Scream*) a hernia, Flynn presents us with a largely thirtysomething cast playing a group of twentysomething college students – all horror fans – who attend a weekend retreat on a small island to improve their grades (!?!), unaware that their hosts plan to use them in a feature-length snuff film with each murder scene lifted from a classic horror movie. Said cannon fodder is comprised primarily of standard issue Central Casting jocks and sluts, rounded out by a gay guy (Justin Chon), a black guy who keeps reminding us that he's black by beginning every second sentence with "yo" and ending every third one with "dog" (Daryl J. Johnson), and a pigtailed, bespectacled nerdy chick (hot wee Danica McKellar of *The Wonder Years* and *The West Wing*) who makes her entrance stumbling and dropping her books (ooh, adorable).



Familiar faces rounding out the supporting cast (and likely plotting revenge on their agents) include Kane Hodder as the opening sequence victim (ooh, ironic), Burt Young as the crusty captain of the charter boat Orca (ooh, a *Jaws* reference) and William Forsythe as a crusty Scottish groundskeeper named Willie (ooh, MAKE IT STOP!!!). On the off-chance that any viewer may be too irony deficient to get all the genre references, Flynn has named other characters Carpenter, Stoker, Bates, King, Roth (Eli, you've finally arrived!), Argento and Mary Shelley. All this might be idiomatic (if not forgivable) in a *Scary Movie*-type full-on parody, but in this stale *Scream* knockoff it's just more rancid mayo on a shit sandwich.

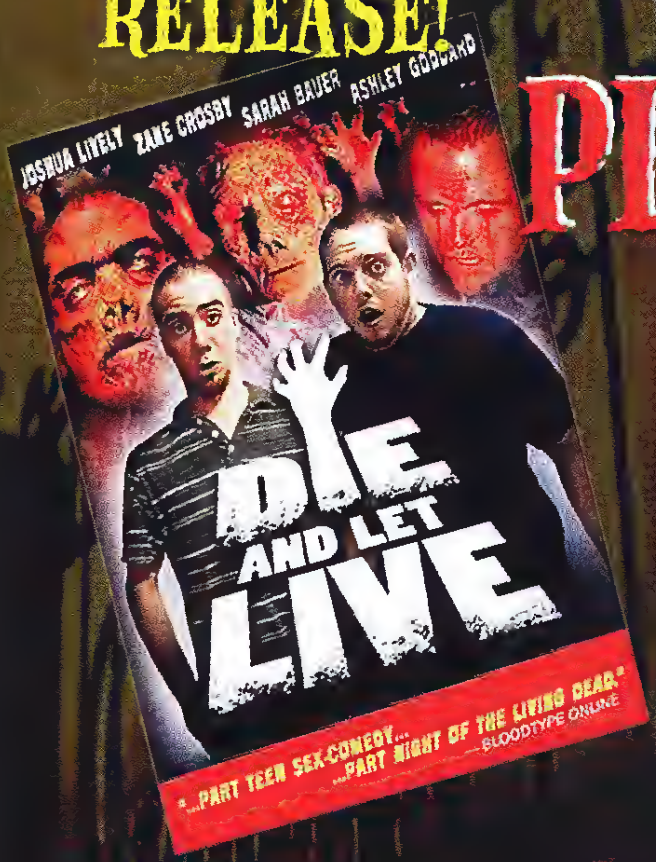
According to IMDb.com, Flynn played rugby in college, and therefore could probably knock my sorry ass into next week. No matter, I'll take that chance, because this is the worst horror film of 2008 .. I hope.

John W. Bowen



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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE GOES GAGA FOR GO-GO

RETURN TO SENDER

MAIL

Global Fright Cinema



Actress Chiaki Kuriyama stole my heart when she put on a kilt and whirled her *manriki* (throwing chain) as gorgeous and psychotic Japanese schoolgirl Go-Go Yubari in *Kill Bill Vol.1* (after she starred in *Ju-On* and played Girl #13 in Kinji Fukasaku's *Battle Royale*). In *Mail*, a horror anthology disguised as a feature-length movie, she plays Mikoto, a girl who helps a detective investigate reports of malicious ghosts who haunt everything from cursed paintings to public toilets. Using a holy golden handgun loaded with magical bullets, he sends the spirits back to Hades (cue subpar special effects). Alas, not even Chiaki in a schoolgirl uniform can save this flick from its plodding, predictable plot. .

Body Count: 1

Chiaki's Screen Time: 15:11

FOLLICLE FOIBLES

HAIR EXTENSIONS

Toei Video



Bless Japanese filmmakers for not giving up on concepts that have been beaten to death. Case in point: the latest from Sion Sono (*Suicide Club*), who takes the "cursed object" movie to a whole new level of ridiculousness. The body of a dead girl killed by organ harvesters is stolen from the morgue by a madman who has discovered that her hair is still growing at an alarming rate. He sells it to salons to be used as – you guessed it – hair extensions. Kuriyama stars as Yuko, an apprentice at one of the salons that buys the hair and must deal with the fiendish follicles killing anyone who gets a weave. Not as scary as it is goofy, Chiaki really deserves much better.

Body Count: 14

Chiaki's Screen Time: 27:26

DAUGHTER OF DARKNESS

LAST QUARTER

Geneon



Japanese cinema is not renowned for its gothic horror, so I was ecstatic that Ai Yazawa's manga *Last Quarter* had been adapted to film. Here Kuriyama plays Mizuki, a girl who discovers on her 19th birthday that her boyfriend has cheated on her. She runs off and hides in an abandoned mansion where she meets Adam, a brooding, guitar-playing goth boy (Tokyo pop star Hyde) and decides to run away with him. On her way to the rendezvous she's hit by a truck, winds up in a coma and her amnesiac spirit is trapped in the mansion. Luckily, two students decide to help get her spirit back into her body before it's lost forever. Major goth points if you can get through this one without crying!

Body Count: 0

Chiaki's Screen Time: 41:52

Last Chance Lance

CLIPPED WINGS

FALLEN ANGELS

Starring Michael Kaliski, Bill Moseley and Michael Dorn
Written and directed by Jeff Thomas
Warner Bros.

If you were given the ability to make a horror movie and could cast anybody you wanted in it, who would it be? Leatherface? Jason? A *Hills Have Eyes* mutant? How about Peter Brady from *The Brady Bunch*? They're all here



Fallen Angels is centred around an FBI team called in to investigate the skeletal remains of dead children discovered in a state prison being readied for demolition. In the process they unwittingly release seven deadly demons and their ferocious leader – who are all out for blood.

Filmed in the decrepit Ohio State Reformatory – yes, the same one where *The Shawshank Redemption* was filmed – it features a cool cast of horror movie icons, including Bill Moseley (*TCM2*), Kane Hodder (*Friday the 13th VII-X*), Reggie Bannister (*Phantasm*), Michael Berryman (*The Hills Have Eyes*) and David Hess (*Last House On The Left*). Even *Star Trek*'s cuddly Klingon Michael Dorn puts in an appearance, as does Kevin McCarthy, who is best known for his role in the 1956 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

Most surprisingly, Christopher Knight (a.k.a. Peter Brady) clocks in a solid performance, as does 71-year-old comedienne Ruth Buzzi whose cameo as psychic Madame Perril is one of the high points of the movie.

Unfortunately, Bob Keene, who headed up the special effects department and who has worked on everything from *Hellraiser II* to *Dog Soldiers*, drops the ball on this one, as most of the creature effects look like they were fished out of a dumpster after a GWAR concert.

Director Jeff Thomas, whose other foray into directing was his lamentable freshman effort *13 Seconds*, doesn't deserve to be working on a film for Warner Brothers with a cast like this so early in his career. It's too bad, because *Fallen Angels* had an interesting message to deliver about religious faith, damnation and redemption but it was lost in the muddled mess.

Last Chance Lance

HUNTING CREATURES



A LATE NIGHT RAVE AT AN ABANDONED CHEMICAL PLANT HAS NASTY CONSEQUENCES WHEN LEAKING CHEMICALS TURN THE PARTY GOERS INTO RAVENOUS FLESH EATING ZOMBIES! A SMALL SQUAD OF COMMANDOS IS GIVEN THE JOB OF EXTERMINATING THE LIVING DEAD AS THE SIZE OF THE ZOMBIE ARMY INCREASES WITH EACH NEW VICTIM BITTEN. WHO WILL SURVIVE AND WHAT WILL BE LEFT OF THEM AS THE ZOMBIE HORDE MEETS, GREETS AND THEN EATS ALL WHO STAND IN THEIR WAY?

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TAG: YOU'RE DEAD!

ZOMBIE OUTBREAKS ARE FLARING UP ALL OVER IN THREE NEW LOW-BUDGET TALES OF DEADLY CONTAGION.

BY TREVOR TUMINSKI

DIE AND LET LIVE

Starring Joshua Lively, Zane Crosby and Sarah Bauer
Directed by Justin Channell
Written by Justin Channell, Zane Crosby and Joshua Lively
Heretic



Zombie-ism is simply no match for teenage hormones. When Benny and Smalls – smart-mouthed buddies bound by dolphin-encrusted "Best Friends Forever" pendants – throw a party designed to help steer Benny's crush away from the arms of the town's sexual conquistador, not even an undead-causing viral outbreak from a nearby medical facility can curb their enthusiasm. As the locals become bloodthirsty ghouls, the wisecracking pair must avoid getting "douched over" by the girls they pine for, the jock meathead and the guy who gets wrecked too fast and turns every party into a drunken spectacle. Trapped, surrounded by zombies and, worse, with their pizza stuck on the other side of the fence, Benny and Smalls find themselves in the fight of their (social) lives.

With copious amounts of nimble, acid-tongued dialogue and even a cameo appearance by Troma kingpin Lloyd Kaufman, *Die and Let Live* is a valiant effort in crafting a truly funny teen zom-com. The special effects are limited to latex and fake blood, the pop-punk soundtrack is a little lame and some of the sharpest scripting is wasted in the mouths of mostly amateur actors, yet only the obviously ultra-low budget is holding this crew back from churning out a zombified version of *Superbad*.

DAYS OF DARKNESS

Starring Tom Eplin, John Lee Ames and Sabrina Gennarino
Written and directed by Jake Kennedy
Lionsgate

Curse those frozen comets! When one crashes to Earth in *Days of Darkness*, it releases a parasitic dust that spawns countless undead. As is so often the case, the film focuses its scant budget on the tension of the group dynamic within close quarters, so a handful of colourful personalities who would normally never cross paths under regular circumstances band together to survive a growing number of zombies with a taste for human flesh. A gun-toting hothead, an ex-mercenary, a bible thumper and a retired porn star are just a few of the characters that must overcome their differences in order to remain among the living.



A stiff-legged walk and bloodstained mouths are all that separate the dead from the living here, and though the effects aren't bad, the "science" of the plot is both problematic and inconsistent. Some of the male infected have their junk fall off during the transformation, some of the women become mysteriously pregnant with alien babies, some people don't turn even after they're bitten and the parasite turns out to be allergic to alcohol in the end? Something tells me writer/director Jake Kennedy isn't allergic to alcohol or this movie probably wouldn't have been made.

DAY X

Starring Ken Edwards, Jason Brenizer and Caitlin Cagle
Written and directed by Jason Hack
Image

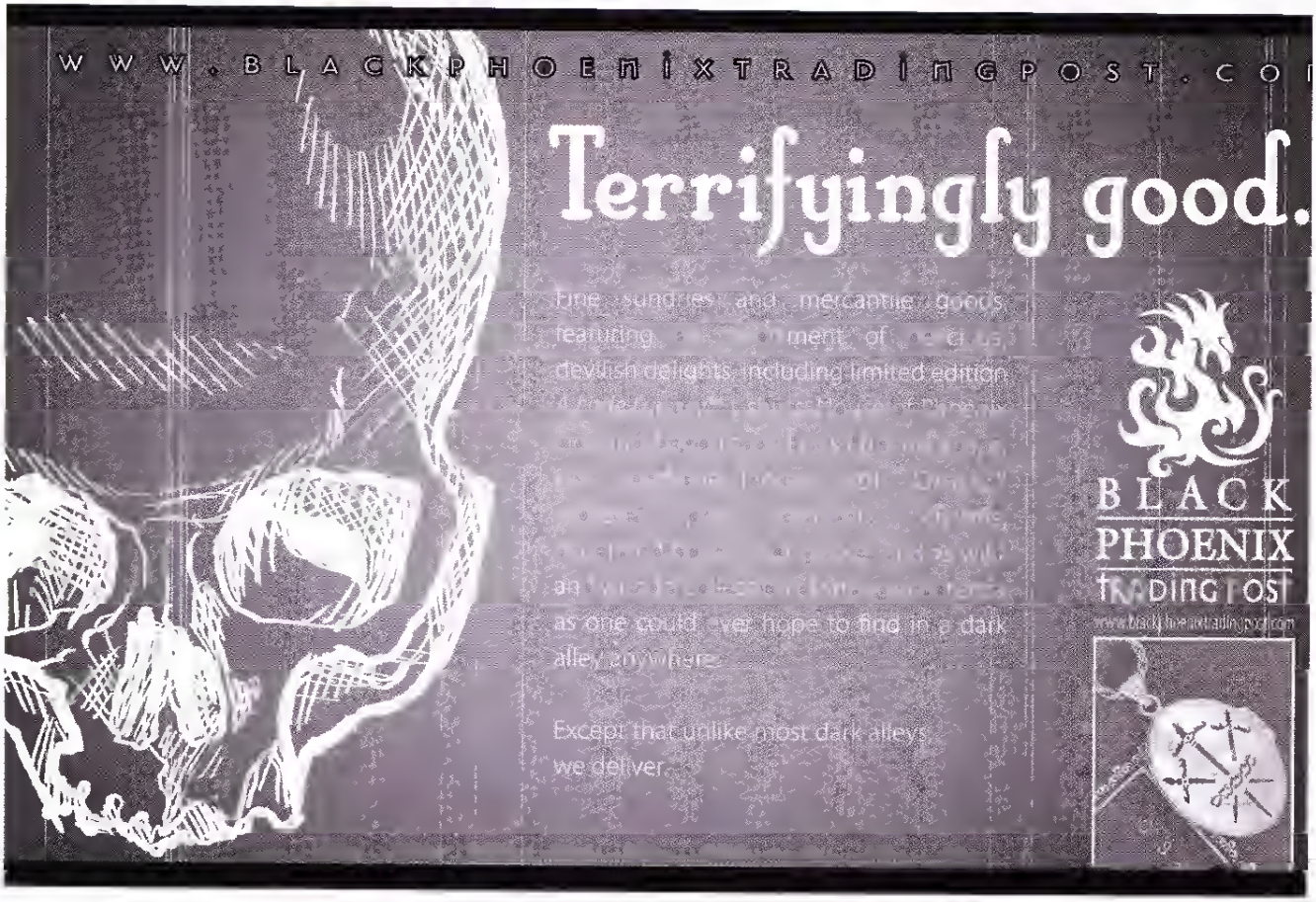
"This movie probably cost a lot less than you think!" reads a line in the end credits for *Day X*. While I wouldn't go that far, a low budget is readily apparent in this story of eleven strangers in an abandoned steel mill trying to avoid succumbing to Series 14, an airborne biological weapon. The contagion "turns most of the brain to jelly," resulting in charcoal-skinned infected that lurch, run and crawl, aren't necessarily susceptible to head shots and have a lethal bite that laces the victim's bloodstream with venom.



Writer/director Jason Hack doesn't seem to find his legs until fifteen minutes in, largely on the back of Ken Edwards' magnetic performance as tough-talking hero Frank Chambers. His booming voice and prison yard stare fills the screen.

The movie ultimately stumbles due to some of the remaining cast, and the distraction of the amateur extras playing the contaminated. The DVD reveals that Hack went to impressive lengths to train his talent in the art of playing, or fighting, the undead, but it only works about half the time. Hack is no hack but a deeper talent pool and more backing are necessary if he wants to take us to the next level.


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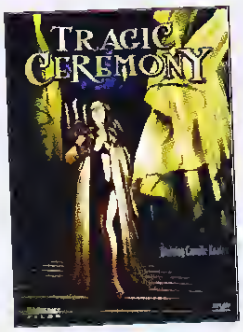
Tragic Ceremony: Riccardo Freda's atmospheric early "giallo hybrid."

DON'T FORGET ABOUT FREDA!

TRAGIC CEREMONY (1972)

Starring Camille Keaton and Barbara Bouchet
Directed by Riccardo Freda
Written by Mario Bianchi, Jose G. Maesso and Leonardo Martin
Dark Sky

Although Riccardo Freda is credited with kick-starting Mario Bava's directing career, it should be remembered that he was an accomplished filmmaker in his own right, with a career that spanned almost 60 years. *Tragic Ceremony* is the director's next-to-last gothic horror film, and he fills it with all the atmosphere and style of the genre, but also brings it into the modern era (circa 1972) with flair – and flared hell-bottoms. While its Italian title, translated as *From the Secret Police Files of a European Capital*, sells the film as a giallo, Freda blends the giallo with the gothic, predicting Argento's *Suspiria* by five years.



The plot alludes to the Manson family via a group of hippies. Jane (Camille Keaton: *I Spit on Your Grave*) and her three platonic boyfriends. One of the boys, hoping for a little more to their relationship, unknowingly gives her a cursed string of pearls. When the group is forced to take refuge from a storm, they meet Lord Alexander (Luigi Pistilli) and his eerie Lady Alexander (Luciana Paluzzi). Jane, through an unspoken connection to the pearls, falls under Lady Alexander's spell, much like the Manson cultists fell for ol' Charlie, and she finds herself the main course of an occult sacrifice. When the boys break up the ceremony, the cultists begin slaughtering each other and the hippies must make their escape. Confused? Don't worry, there's a psychiatrist in the film who'll explain the entire thing.

Although Freda was working under a tight budget, his direction holds up. Unfortunately, the film does not. It's very uneven; often the camera work is amateur and the lighting is downright sloppy. Even the effects, which are credited to Carl Rambaldi (*Dune*), are inconsistent. It's as if he had blown the budget on one major effect, leaving the rest to be carried out by much less experienced hands. Still, the film remains entertaining, atmospheric, and even shocking at points – especially for forgiving Freda fans.

Jason Pichonsky

MILLIGAN MADNESS

GURU THE MAD MONK (1970)

Starring Neil Flanagan, Jaqueline Webb and Judith Israel
Written and directed by Andy Milligan
Retromedia

Don't bother snoring through the first two recycled public domain staples on Retromedia's latest triple-feature, *Blood Flood*. The ultra-cheap *Grave of the Vampire* and the totally hopeless Mexican import *House of Evil* are merely window dressing for the last treat on the disc – a lesson in real cult appeal from notorious cut-rate auteur Andy Milligan.



Granted, Milligan's *Guru the Mad Monk* may not represent a huge jump in terms of quality over the other two films, but it's much more personal than the often indifferent cookie-cutter productions of his 42nd Street peers. The director's grubby fingerprints are all over the film, a barely competent medieval shocker that stars Neil Flanagan as Father Guru, an effeminate priest who rules over an island prison, where he tortures and kills at will. Guard Carl (Paul Lieber) comes to Guru for help in rescuing his innocent girlfriend Nadja (Judith Israel), who is scheduled to be put to death. Guru agrees, but only if Carl agrees to sell the bodies of executed criminals to medical schools.

Tacky and insistently mean-spirited, *Guru* mainly exists as a spiteful attack on the corruption and treachery of Catholicism (a pet subject of Milligan's) sprinkled with dime-store sadism and his usual psychosexual hang-ups. The domineering relationship between the schizophrenic Guru and his hunchback, Igor (Jack Spencer), is rife with sadomasochistic undercurrents, while Jaqueline Webb turns in the film's worst performance – an achievement in its own right – as Olga, Guru's bisexual witch/vampire/mistress.

Like Milligan's other works, the film is as visually offensive as possible, from unsightly costumes to pimply actors stumbling over lines through thick Big Apple accents. Likewise, professionalism is never as important as the film's angry message, so bad movie fans can delight at Milligan's shockingly inept attempts at gore (a laughably fake eye-gouging and band-lopping), not to mention an appalling lack of attention to detail in the 12th-century setting, from modern electrical fixtures to the sounds of street traffic.

Guru the Mad Monk probably isn't going to attract any new fans to Milligan's twisted genius; you don't dip your toe into films like this, you do a swan dive into the deep end and just hope you don't drown. But for those already hopeless followers of the late, great director, this Retromedia disc is the only place to get your *Guru* fix.

Paul Corupe



The Nude Vampire: *Rollin's schlocky bloodsucker flick fails up to live up to its title*

TOPLESS AND TOOTHLESS

THE NUDE VAMPIRE (1970)

Starring Olivier Martin, Maurice Lemaître and Caroline Cartier.
Directed by Jean Rollin
Written by Jean Rollin and S.H. Mosti
Redemption USA

Jean Rollin's second feature film (a.k.a. *Le vampire nue*) makes one wonder if perhaps the blood of Ed Wood, Jr. was coursing through his veins after some mandatory transfusion was needed to save his life. "Nude," when applied to the human form, means full birthday suit, with nary a stitch of clothing covering up the naughty bits, yet no vampire actually appears nude in *The Nude Vampire* (topless, yes, which isn't the same thing).



"Vampire," however, has many connotations, and in this obliquely constructed idiocy, it's contemporarily applied to a woman from another dimension who remains immortal so long as she avoids sunlight and feeds off the blood offered to her by masked members of a suicide cult. These travelling futurists dwell in the mansion of one Georges Radamante (Maurice Lemaître, future screenwriter of Rollin's 1973 film *The Iron Rose*), a greedy industrialist permitted by the cult leader to periodically prick her for blood (and see her boobs) so he and his colleagues can decode her mutant DNA.

The symbiotic relationship is upset when Georges' moping son Pierre stumbles upon the wandering vampire one night, marking the first time she sees a human face. Hypnotized by her stillness and sultry demeanour, Pierre sneaks into dad's mansion for another encounter, and, like a scene from *Eyes Wide Shut*, witnesses boobs and debauchery – and a suicide offering, albeit staged using two bits from the film's $1.25 budget. When Pierre shoots the butler and escapes, dad decides to sell the family assets and takes the vampire, his co-investors and twin servants (who wear noisy chandelier bras) to an isolated chateau constructed in the grand Romanesque-Fascist style, where they fight off the cult and their latest recruit, Pierre.

Even if one can politely acknowledge an occasionally inspired visual that's also in focus, this is an amateurish concoction with scenes shot from script pages. Rollin's dog didn't eat the night before principal photography began. Arty and allegorical, sure, but even the bonus short, *Les amours jaunes* (1958), has more sophistication and confidence. *Nude Vampire* is at best kitsch, blessed with laughable dialogue, Yvon Scrault's trippy improv jazz score, and a short running time.

Mark R. Hasan

A MALEVOLENT MERMAID

THE LORELEY'S GRASP (1974)

Starring Tony Kendall, Helga Line and Silvia Tortosa
Written and directed by Armando de Ossorio
Deimos

Partway through his quartet of *Blind Dead* films, auteur Armando de Ossorio decided to switch gears and expand upon the myth of Germanic God Wotan. Hence *The Loreley's Grasp* (a.k.a. *Grasp of the Lorelei*, *When the Screaming Stops*), about a cursed daughter who, over seven moonlit nights, must transform into the Loreley, an aquatic creature feared by sailors and Rhine valley locals because of its need to feed on thumping human heart muscle to return to a state of centuries-long inertia.

Although described by locals as an "obscene beast," the creature lacks the oomph of Walerian Borowczyk's frothy roving phallus in *La Bete* (1975) and bears closer resemblance to the Gorn lizard creature from the original *Star Trek* series. De Ossorio's Loreley monster is never seen in full detail, but there's plenty of stalking footage featuring a rubber claw tearing at flesh, exposing gravy-like blood, chest viscera and a unique phenomenon apparently native to Rhine women: hollow boobs.

Interwoven are other standard exploitation elements: hot chicks, a studly hero in loud clothes who demands "all access" to the girls school he's paid to protect, and a catfight that, incredibly, enables the hero to flee Loreley's gothic lair. Plus there are some novel set pieces, such as Wotan's treasure and a sword used to kill the beast, which returns Loreley to her original state as a hippy-trippy bikini-clad babe with a pale, flour-dusted face.



Boasting pretty rustic exterior locations and garish interior sets, Deimos' DVD offers a lovely anamorphic transfer of the uncut Spanish version, plus some superb liner notes. *The Loreley's Grasp* also comes with an amusingly divergent English dub and subtitle tracks that offer significantly different translations. When the wacky Prof. Von Lande explains in English how "the moonlight cultivates the marbles of metamorpho-



Killing Spree: *Video-shot violence at its silliest, starring bearded actor Asbestos Felt.*

sis," you'll get a warm and fuzzy feeling in your chest, clearly indicating you've just found a lost gem of bad, el cheapo filmmaking. It's pure gold in an era of endless and amateurish direct-to-DVD crap.

Mark R. Hasan

HANDYCAM CARNAGE

KILLING SPREE (1987)

Starring Asbestos Felt, Courtney Lercara and Raymond Carbone
Written and directed by Tim Ritter
Camp Motion Pictures

A direct-to-video relic from the 1980s, *Killing Spree* is a *bad* movie. The story is ludicrous, the dialogue embarrassing, the acting laughable, and the production values make Lloyd Kaufman look like Jerry Bruckheimer. It's pure amateur filmmaking by people perhaps better suited to watching horror movies than producing them. All of which suggests the movie is unwatchable, yet that isn't quite the case. *Killing Spree* has an undeniable Ed Wood quality, and viewed with just the right level of cynicism and intoxication, it can be hilarious.

The absurdly named Asbestos Felt stars as Tom Russo, a hapless airline employee with a bobo beard who's convinced that his wife is cheating on him. Once he discovers a diary outlining her illicit affairs, he embarks on the titular killing spree. Onscreen atrocities include a skull sliced by a ceiling fan made of machetes, an old woman's jaw being torn off and a man given an unnecessarily close haircut with a lawnmower. The gore is graphic and constant, but the budget is so low that it isn't realistic. The film is never shocking or disturbing, either, just unintentionally humorous.

Falling into the so-bad-it's-good category, this is a case where a movie's flaws have become its strengths and a small cult audience has formed for *Killing Spree* over the years. It's certainly not a classic but popular enough to warrant a special edition DVD release from the appropriately named Camp Motion Pictures. Fans will get a drunken and giggly commentary from a few of the actors, as well as a surprisingly serious and apologetic one from writer/director Tim Ritter. The disc also features trailers, an investor's reel and an informative documentary filled with behind-the-scenes footage revealing the fun had by the cast and crew during the twelve-day shoot. *Killing Spree* is an entertaining little genre flick to laugh at but never with... if that's your thing.



Philip Brown

BACK TO THE BOG

SWAMP THING: THE SERIES 1990 1991

Starring Dick Durock, Mark Lindsay Chapman and Carrell Myers
Written and directed by various
Shout Factory

It isn't rare for a comic book movie adaptation to fail, but has any character ever been as badly misinterpreted as DC's Swamp Thing? When legendary comic writer Alan Moore took over the horror/fantasy title in the early '80s, he helped usher in a new era for the medium, with dark, mythological storylines written for a more mature audience. But both films, Wes Craven's 1982 comedic misfire *Swamp Thing* and 1989's family-friendly *The Return of the Swamp Thing*, translated Swampy into a B-movie cartoon.

When the USA Network used the character in a series that would follow the winning formula behind previous successes *The Hitchhiker* and *Ray Bradbury Theatre*, it might have signalled something a little more profound. Sbyeah right!

Like *Return*, *Swamp Thing: The Series* began as family entertainment: the main character is a boy named Jim who lives with his mother near the swamp and talks to Swamp Thing like he's some sort of father figure. Swampy only really appears when someone is in trouble, usually at the hands of the local mad scientist Dr. Arcane (an egotistical Englishman with bad hair).

The series' producers tried to make it more appealing for its late-night audience in the second season, writing Jim out of the show, introducing his adult stepbrother Will and creating more action for Swamp Thing as Arcane comes up with a new evil plot to be foiled each episode. As a result, Swampy faces a voodoo priest, a bird-man mutant and even a scent that causes hatred!

Saddled with a micro-budget, painfully wooden acting and ridiculous dialogue ("Listen here you transistorized chamber pot!"), *Swamp Thing: The Series* is about as awful as





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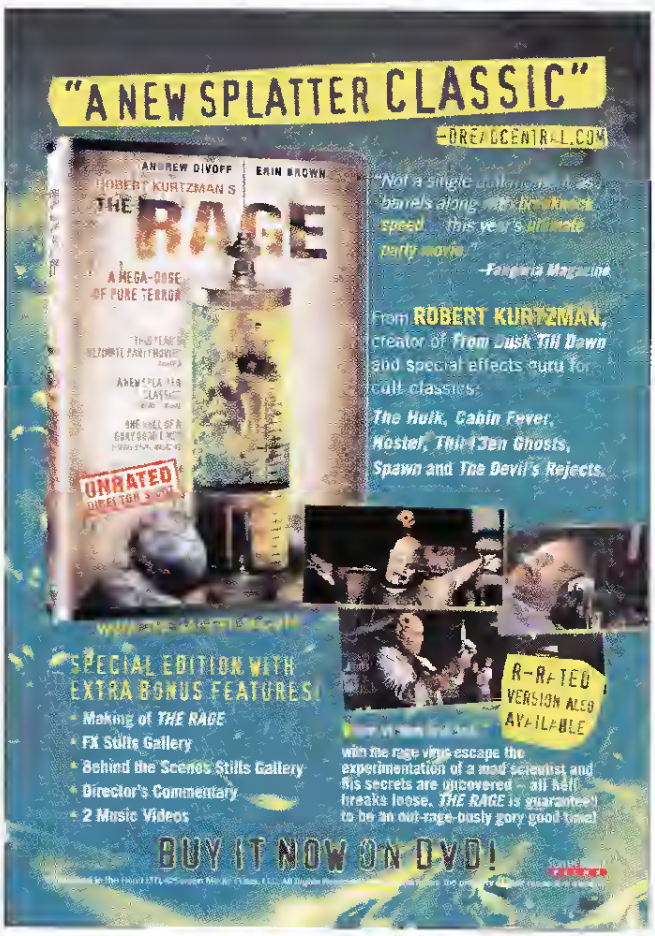
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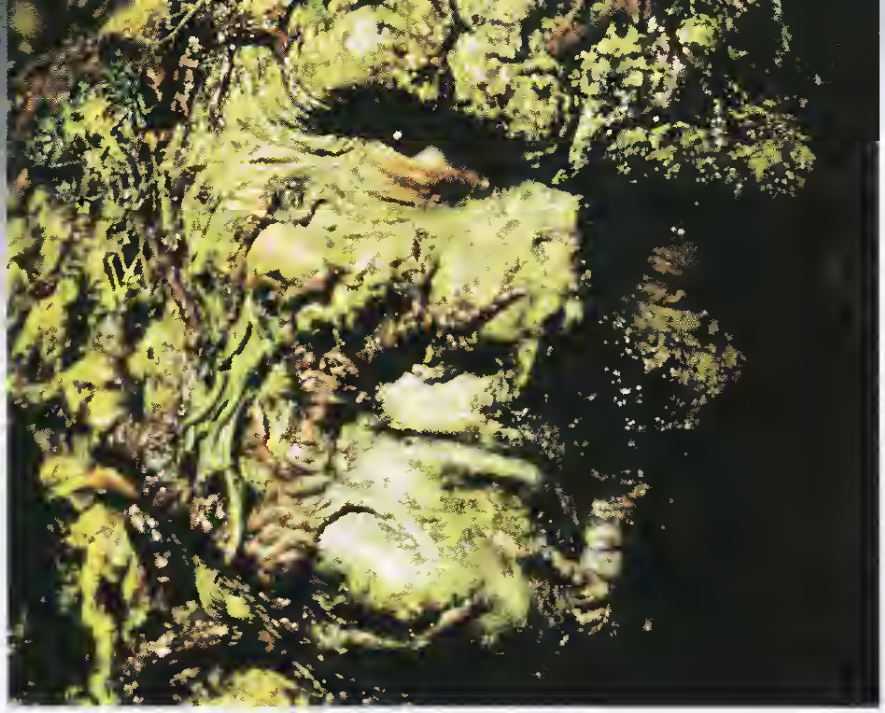
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Swamp Thing: The Series: *The creature in its most ridiculous incarnation to date*

its gets, and yet it's just as entertaining – in the way that watching car accidents or late-night religious programming can be fun.



Shout Factory's four-disc DVD set presents all 22 nonsensical episodes and some short interviews with original *Swamp Thing* comic co-creator Len Wein and star Dick Durock, who talks about his stuntman/acting career and how he became the man behind the moss.

If you're like most folks, you probably didn't even know a *Swamp Thing* TV show existed until now. It may not be a faithful adaptation of one of comicdom's coolest characters, but TV has rarely been so off-the-wall. And for that, we just have to recommend it anyway. Hey, it beats the crap out of another season of *Dancing with the Stars*.

Aaron Von Lupton

SWITCHBLADE CIRCUMCISION

RICCO THE MEAN MACHINE (1973)

Starring Chris Mitchum, Arthur Kennedy and Barbara Bouchet
Directed by Tulio Demicheli
Written by Mario Di Nardo, Jose G. Maesso and Santiago Moncada
Dark Sky

If you were around in 1973 and saw this film under its US title *Cauldron of Death*, you'd have been in for a surprise. Although the Spanish-Italian co-production *Ricco the Mean Machine* was marketed as horror here in North America, it's actually a gangland revenge flick – albeit a gory one.

Ricco Aversi (Chris Mitchum) reluctantly goes looking for revenge after returning from a two-year stint in prison. At first, he just wants to put some hurt on his father's murderer, Don Vito (Arthur Kennedy), a drug smuggler who sent Ricco to prison and stole his girlfriend Rosa (Malissa Longo). To do so, he teams up with Rosa's con-girl cousin Scilla (Barbara Bouchet). But as Vito retaliates, Ricco is pulled deeper into this world of crime, where his vengeance turns increasingly bloody.

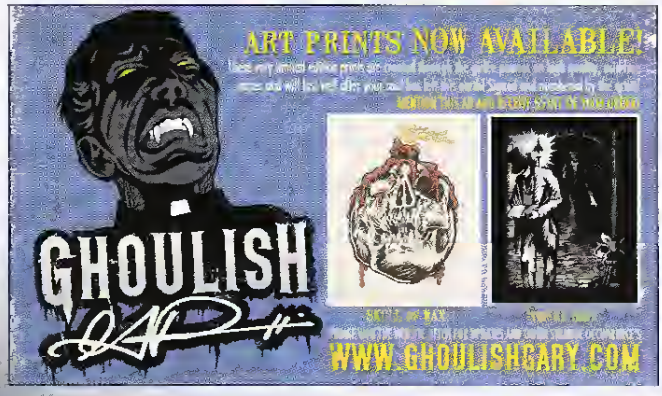
Apparently, Chris Mitchum, second son of Robert Mitchum, became a bankable action star in Europe after he left the US to work on the 1972 action flick *Summertime Killer*. But Mitchum's Ricco is more lean machine than "mean machine." It's hard to believe the lanky and naive Ricco, who consistently looks more confused than angry, could hold his own against Vito and his goons. It's harder still to believe that in real life Mitchum holds a black belt in karate.

Longo and Bouchet are on hand to titillate, including a scene where Scilla hares all on the side of the road to flag down Vito's henchmen. In a nod to the surreal, smoke drifts through an otherwise black set, as Bouchet crawls onto the hood of the henchmen's car. The studio setting gives this scene an unintentional Fulci-esque quality.



There's blood aplenty in this flick, as well, but the gore scene that stays with you – cut from previous VHS versions – is the audacious castration. Its cut-and-feed-it-to-the-victim scene is pretty unflinching, although the audience is sure to. And yes, Timmy, there is no actual "Cauldron of Death" – Vito uses it to liquidate his enemies, turning them into bars of soap. Aside from some grisly gore, there's not much to recommend to the horror fan. However, if you love '70s crimesploitation, this is indeed a pretty mean machine.

Jason Pichonsky






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ANIMATED DEATH FROM ABOVE

EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS (1956)

Starring Hugh Marlowe, Joan Taylor and Donald Curtis
Directed by Fred F. Sears
Written by Curt Siodmak, George Worthing Yates and Bernard Gordon
Sony



The Real Star Of The Show: *Ray Harryhausen's animated UFOs*



Ray Harryhausen's third trip into stop-motion terror, and his second for schlock producers Sam Katzman and Charles H. Schneer, the literally titled *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* is one of the FX master's most distinctive efforts. While both *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* and *It Came from Beneath the Sea* featured startlingly lifelike creature effects, for *Flying Saucers* Harryhausen was called on to create animated, spinning UFOs that dole out disintegrator-ray annihilation. More than just a showcase for the talented animator, though, this often violent B-film, co-written by Curt Siodmak (*The Invisible Man Returns*, *The Wolfman* and *I Walked with a Zombie*) is also a not-so-subtle parable about a cold war suddenly turned white hot.

The film stars square-jawed Hugh Marlowe as Dr. Marvin, an army scientist exploring the possibilities of space travel as the head of a satellite launching program. But when his experimental rockets begin crashing back down to Earth with no explanation, Marvin's stumped – at least until he and his wife, Carol (Joan Taylor), have a close encounter with a UFO. While they're busy reporting the sighting to army brass, the alien craft lands at the base and is fired on by trigger-happy soldiers. The creatures quickly retreat and retaliate by disintegrating nearly everything in sight. One of the few survivors, Dr. Marvin is later invited to board the ship, where the aliens issue an ultimatum threatening the Earth with total destruction. To combat the invasion, now targeted at Washington, D.C., Marvin develops an electrical field cannon that can disrupt the saucers' flight technology.

Journeyman director Fred F. Sears is often criticized for his poorly paced, uninspired handling of this low-budget programmer; emphasizing action above all else, *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* lazily borrows ideas and dialogue from many other sci-fi films of the time, and incorporates more than its fair share of stock footage. As with many of the films Harryhausen worked on, however, it's easy to excuse the rickety framework in light of the excellent stop-motion effects that have made the film an iconic sci-fi time capsule. While surely not as intricate as his animated rampaging creatures, Harryhausen brings tangibility to his flying saucers, which dip and teeter across the screen like real revolving objects, replicating actual gyroscopic movement. Deftly combining animation and miniature work with all-important eerie, whirling sound effects as the aliens swoop down on their prey, these ships are far more believable than the out-of-focus pie plates, vague meteor-like objects or stationary, set-built constructions usually seen at the time.

Most 1950s science fiction films played off of North American fears of invasion by communist Russia, and *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* is undeniably one of the most fear-mongering sci-fi films of the decade, presenting a hysterical scenario that shows America struggling for solutions in the face of enemy aggression. While a finger is squarely pointed at the US military's reactionary attack on the aliens even before they make attempts to communicate, the faceless saucers – we never do find out exactly what planet they're from – are nightmarish in their relentless hostility. This becomes even more obvious in the film's infamous climactic battle, as the saucers, dislodged from the sky, violently collide into landmarks such as the Washington Monument, the Supreme Court building and the Capitol dome. Although the destruction of these buildings is ostensibly caused by Marvin's own makeshift weapon, these depictions of symbols of American political might crumbling present some of the most apocalyptic images of 1950s cinema.

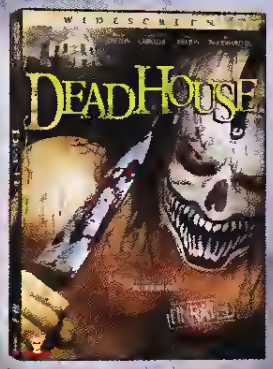
Debuting alongside a revamped *It Came from Beneath the Sea*, Sony's re-release of *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* is a major improvement over the previous DVD edition. Once you skip past the needlessly colourized version of the film, you can gorge yourself on an impressive selection of extras, including a Harryhausen commentary, documentaries on everything from screenwriter Bernard Gordon to the music score and the film's making of, plus interviews with Joan Taylor and Harrybausen himself (conducted by Tim Burton, whose *Mars Attacks!* pays obvious tribute to this classic). A welcome upgrade to a landmark genre film, this new release also offers just enough encouragement for fans to keep watching the skies in hopes of more Harryhausen upgrades to follow.

Paul Corupe

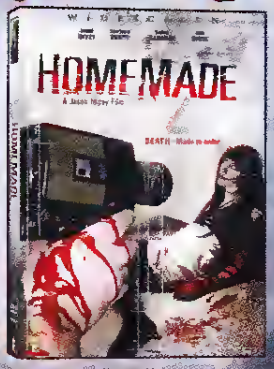
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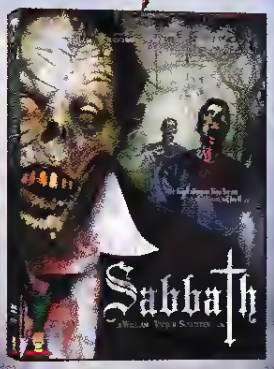
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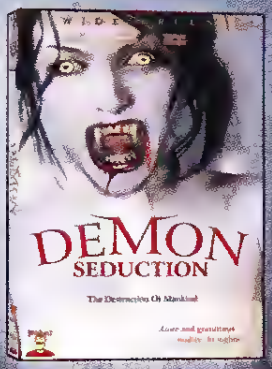
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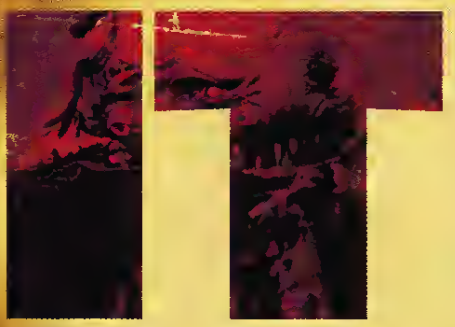
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IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT

R DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

GETTING STICKY FOR THE GREEN SLIME
by John W. Bowen



"On a space station, title substance – exposed to blood – grows into red-eyed, tentacled monsters that quickly multiply and threaten to spread to Earth. Not as much fun as it sounds." – *Leonard Maltin's 2003 Movie & Video Guide.*

Well, neither is your mama, Leonard, you consummate fucking pussy, so I'll take it from here, m'kay? *The Green Slime* – a.k.a. *Battle Beyond the Stars*, *Il Fango Verde*, *After the Destruction of Space Station Gamma: Big Military Operation* (hm .. wonder which was the Japanese title?) – is a paradox on many levels. It's a Japanese film written by Americans, starring American actors (not to mention American extras, most of whom were US military personnel stationed in Japan at the time). It's a '50s-style futuristic alien invasion film produced at the apex of the swingin' '60s. It begins as an *Armageddon*-type asteroid-threatens-Earth story but morphs into a monster movie around the 30-minute mark. It's delirious, cheeseball sci-fi from a director best known for 2000's controversial cult sensation *Battle Royale* and countless crime dramas. And, most importantly, it's so bad it's brilliant.

When a giant space rock hurtles toward Earth, General Thompson (Bud Widom) at United Nations Space Command knows decisive action must be taken: "The only answer is to blast that thing out of the sky!" A crew is dispatched from Space Station Gamma to land on the asteroid, drill a hole, drop in a nuke and, well, blast that thing out of the sky. Several near misses and one narrow escape later, the mission's accomplished, but one of the space jockeys accidentally brings traces of the titular substance found on the asteroid – green slime – back to the station. When it comes in contact with human blood (don't ask), an army of red-eyed, electrified, shrieking, tentacled monsters bursts forth, laying siege to the station and interrupting the lead characters' love triangle. What? Didn't I mention that part already? Yes, all this is the backdrop for the *real* story, in which former best buds Commander Jack Rankin and Commander Vince Elliot fall out over a dame – specifically Rankin's ex, who's now the love of Elliot's life. Just like *Casablanca*. Only in space. With electric slime monsters.

Consider the beefcake factor, ladies: Rankin is played by TV and western veteran Robert Horton, who, according to *Time Magazine* in 1959, sported measurements of 42-31-40 (baby got back!), and his spectacularly shellacked coiffure would doubtless strike envy into the heart of Jack Lord. Rankin's rival for the fair maiden's hand is played by ubiquitous B-movie tough guy Richard Jaekel (*Grizzly*, *The Dirty Dozen*), and Bond girl Luciana Paluzzi (*Thunderball*) plays love interest Dr. Lisa Benson, whose suspiciously heavy Italian accent further ups the camp quotient.

Several issues back, I promised to include the best of the worst among my monthly delete bin love-ins (and yes, *Invasion of the Blood Farmers* will be feted like fetid royalty in the near future), but as bad horror films go, *The Green Slime* is a breed apart in several respects. Sure, there's the requisite dumb-ass storyline, howlingly awful script, laughable special effects and more, but the production design is surprisingly cool. Hokey and dated, sure, but the attention to detail is pretty impressive for an obviously low-budget film, and the late-'60s colour scheme is, well, far out, man.

The acting (particularly from Paluzzi and future Oscar nominee Jaekel) is passable, albeit in the service of gems like, "Now don't you tell me what to do! I'm tired of being told what to do! I'm tired of taking orders!" And dig if you will, kids, on that Arthur Brown-meets-the-Doors theme song: "Is this something in your head/Will you believe it when you're dead?/Green Sliiiiiiiiime!!!"

This endearing schlockfest turns up once or twice annually – usually late at night – on various movie channels (on my birthday last year!) but remains available to consumers only in pan-and-scan VHS, even though it's still owned by MGM. Betcha can see where this is leading, huh?

This isn't the first time I've exhorted you, the *Rue Morgue* faithful, to lobby the powers that be to give an overlooked gem a shiny, new, extras-encrusted DVD release. Nor will it be the last. In the meantime, however, I've got a deadline to meet, and that Serbian she-wolf in the office upstairs is a cruel mistress, so get the hell out of my basement.

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IN THIS ISSUE!

HALLOWEEN
Stefan Hutchinson and Tim Seely *Devil's Due*

THE EVIL DEAD
Mark Verheiden and John Bolton *Dark Horse*

HIGH MOON
David Gallaher and Steve Ellis
DC/ZudaComics.com

INNOCENT VOL.1 TPB
Shawn Granger and Tony De Zuniga
King Tractor

THEREFORE REPENT!
Jim Munroe and Salgood Sam
No Media Kings

THE KILLING JOKE - SPECIAL EDITION
Alan Moore and Brian Bolland *DC/Vertigo*

Michael Myers, you Halloweenie, I'm not afraid of you. The last time you gave me the creeps was, well, it was the first time you gave me the creeps. Your franchise stands as walking, stalking, shuffling proof of the law of diminishing returns. Of course, I have seen every installment, because clearly I am a glutton for predictability.

Or am I? Students, please turn to p.19 of issue #2 of the comic book miniseries *Halloween: Nightdance* [pictured], and we'll see if we can't all learn something from writer Stefan Hutchinson and artist Tim Seely, who have given the boogeyman back his boogie.

Here's the question you are all asking: What the hell is Michael doing to his victim, and why?

"It was only in the original *Halloween* movie that Michael is playful in this malevolent way," says Hutchinson. "Consider when Michael puts the sheet over his head [to disguise himself as Bob, killing Lynda] – we've never had a scene that comes close to that since. Why does he choose to make that kill, that way?"

Ah, Michael Myers as, more than mere serial killer, demented torturer. "Of a sort, sure," Hutchinson agrees. "This is the one character trait of Michael's that no one has ever pursued in the sequels. No one ever considered it, period." Hutchinson considered it, and then some. He wrote a thesis about the *Halloween* series, two well-received *Halloween* one-shot comics (see *RM#37, 60*) and made a documentary film, *Halloween: 25 Years of Terror*. His goal with *Nightdance* is not to reboot Michael, but "return him to the seeds of the first movie."

So, who was Michael in that film that he hasn't been since? He was The Shape, "the monster from our id, our collective unconscious." Hutchinson says that he takes his cue from the fact that *Forbidden Planet* is on television in the background during Carpenter's movie. "Clearly the point is that Michael operates in a similar manner" to *FP*'s monster, "fuelled by the collective unconscious." Not to mention catalyzed by, yes, a virgin.

Hutchinson describes Michael in terms of fatal dualism. "*Halloween* has this weird randomness: Laurie and her sisters, for example. Sublimely, fate lines things up as the villain wants it – similar to the strange and wicked certainty of Mitchum's character in *Night of the Hunter* – and that's the element of the supernatural that I don't mind having applied to Michael." The movie, he adds, even includes an oft-overlooked sequence wherein a high school teacher instructs her students (including the victims) about the two aspects of fate, natural and embodied.



Michael Myers "clowns" around with a victim in ***Halloween: Nightdance***

"Michael, The Shape, is both. He is the boogeyman incarnate, with its vague connotations of darkness and jumping out of bedroom closets. And he is a standard killer, a pervy voyeur, a game-playing torturer."

Which is exactly what makes him scary. "Call it unpredictability if you want," Hutchinson says. And I will, because it not only distinguishes The Shape-ly Michael from the overly defined, all-supernatural version of the sequels, but also brings us full circle to *Nightdance*, with the bog-tied virgin and that apple.

I'm not spoiling anyone's read by telling you that the girl, Nikki, is about to die, violently. The complicated and rewarding plot of *Nightdance* embraces the familiar *Halloween* teen tropes but ensnares them via guilt by association versus guilt by bloodline. Basically, the primary target is Lisa, a girl who resembles Judith – Michael's sister, his first kill, from the opening moments of the original movie. What Michael himself isn't counting on is his own indirect involvement with Lisa in the past.

Nikki, meanwhile, is collateral damage: she's the heroine's friend – always a death sentence in this franchise.

"For this series I went out of my way to create an intimate relationship between Michael and his victims," Hutchinson says, citing the aforementioned Bob/Lynda sheet effect. "He mimics Nikki's [recent] actions when he kills her."

At the moment of the kill, Nikki is actually playing dead, hoping Michael will assume his work is done and go away. "So he 'plays' as well," says Hutchinson. Plays at killing her, over five suspenseful pages.

It will be interesting to see how the *Halloween* fans receive *Nightdance*. It offers a more complex Michael in a more complex story with a very shocking, very decisive ending. Like many *Halloween* fans, I'm still not afraid of Michael, but that's no failure on Hutchinson's part. How does one maintain the audience's abject fear of the monster under the bed when the beast has become so familiar that it practically lifts the mattress to help with spring cleaning?

Still, thanks to Hutchinson, Seely and *Nightdance*, at least Myers has surprises left in him. It's a long time coming, but worth the wait to get Michael back in Shape again.

For more info visit halloweencomics.com

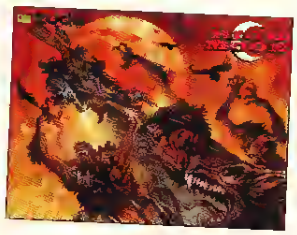
QUICK CUTS

REVIEWS BY GARY BUTLER, ERIC GRANT AND MARK MOYES

Adapting one of modern horror cinema's most important films for the graphic medium, dream team Mark Verheiden and John Bolton wisely opted to tweak the story of the *Evil Dead* to suit their own strengths. Writer Verheiden fleshes out the five main characters to terrific success, allowing even the knucklehead Scotty some growth via his telling of a made-up "urban legend" (issue #1). Master painter Bolton is at the top of his game too, cherry-picking the perfect iconic moments for full-page splashes – the decapitation of Kandarian Linda (issue #3) should be turned into a poster immediately. Diehard fans will miss the "*Evil Dead* cam," but really, is such a thing executable in the panelled medium? I'm with Bolton: do what you can do, and do it well. And offer a fresh perspective where and when possible. **GB**



The second winner of a contract with DC's online publishing initiative zudacomics.com, *High Moon* sees pointy-eared Pinkerton detective Matthew MacGregor ride into the desiccated Wild West town of Blest on the trail of a hairy public menace, only to find himself caught up in a child abduction and your usual stew of sinister small-town secrets. David Gallaher's Stephen-King-vs.-Sergio-Leone mash-up looks like a solid entry in the weird western genre, well suited to artist Steve Ellis' jagged illustrations and pueblo pallet. Between this, upcoming winner *Pray for Death*, and other current contestants *Dead in the Now* and *Pieces of Eden*, Zuda should become a regular stop for blood-hungry web browsers. **EG**



Sometimes judgment can't wait for the pearly gates. *Innocent* maintains that for souls beyond redemption, it's served down here on Earth. Enter the titular mortal angel and his psychopathic sidekick. Together they slay an assortment of evil humans, demons, and humans who inexplicably transform into demons. Originally a web comic, *Innocent* suffers from the now-the-next-door-neighbour-sprouts-tentacles-for-no-reason-other-than-it's-going-to-look-AWESOME school of storytelling, and when-they-hit-themselves-in-the-balls-to-activate-their-evil-powers-it's-going-to-be-HILARIOUS brand of humour. Ultimately, although some of the art is competent, final judgment on this book is never harsh enough – at least, not on its own plotlines. **MM**



A post-Rapture story with an alternate explanation for what happened and why? Utterly credible characters fuelled as much by rejection as denial, and in some cases true goodness? A collapsing Chicago (the micro-focus of the worldwide event) that looks more like a real city in the fortieth week of a garbage strike than *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*? Where do I sign up? What, I have only to purchase *Therefore Repent!* by Jim Munroe and Salgood Sam and I will be transported directly to Heaven? Oh, I see – I'll be in Heaven only for the length of time it takes me to read this intelligently fucked-up noir horror that's as much about the evolving love of a girl and a guy (dressed as a raven and a mummy, respectively) as it is about the devolving social compact. Good enough, then – in fact, superb. **GB**

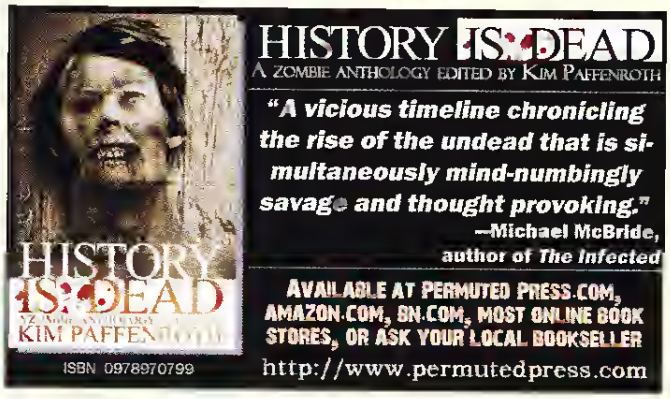


One of the three defining modern-day Joker stories, along with "The Laughing Fish" and *The Dark Night Returns*, 1988's *The Killing Joke* continues to resonate. Alan Moore dismissed the infamous one-shot to me in an interview last year as "a not-good-enough story that needed some livening up," specifically citing his DC editorial-supported decision to torture and cripple Barbara Gordon. Artist extraordinaire Brian Bolland, who spent over a year on this project alone, also long-regretted the finished product, because he did not allow himself enough time to execute the colouring personally. Now, twenty years later, Bolland's newly remastered version makes Moore's "gruesome" story even grimmer with an all-but-bed-dry palette. And when colour rears its head, the head in question ends up crying blood [see before and after, pictured below]. Even Moore himself would be hard-pressed to deny that Bolland has only improved on an already excellent vision. **GB**

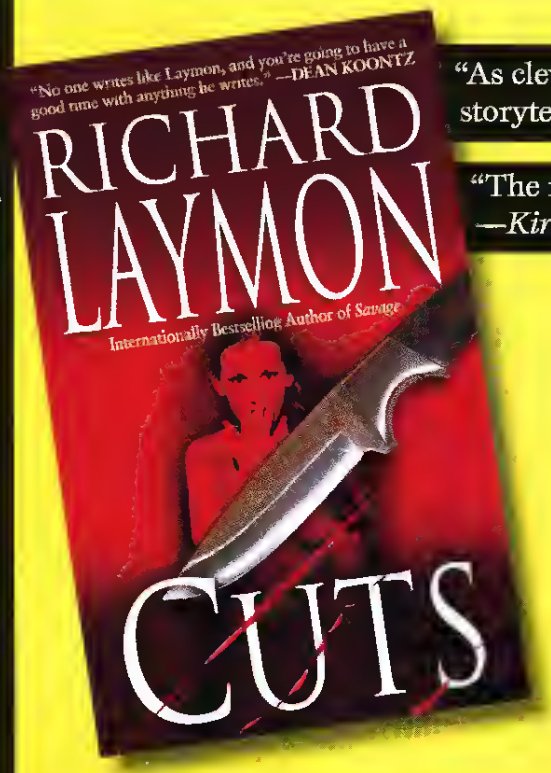








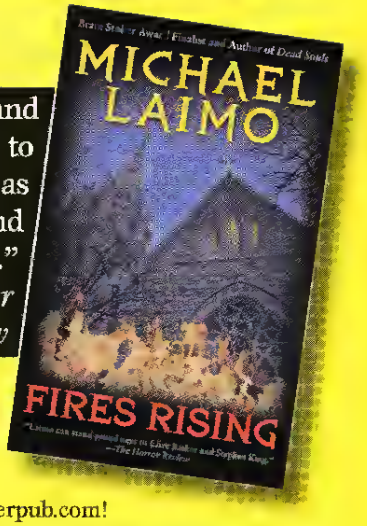
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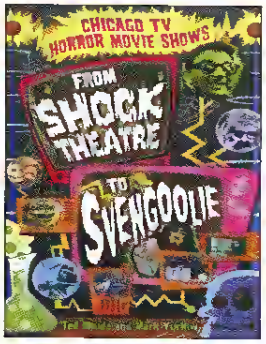
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Local cable legends • cult film conversations • A fan-penned primer



Chicago TV Horror Movie Shows

Ted Okuda and Mark Yurkiw
Lake Claremont

The real test of success for a regionally specific book like *Chicago TV Horror Movie Shows: From Shock Theatre to Svengoolie* is if it's also interesting for those who didn't grow up in the area. Fortunately, this concise, nostalgia-dipped look back at the Windy City's locally produced horror movie showcase is an enjoyable flashback for all that revels in the era when crazed hosts Marvin, Svengoolie, and Son of Svengoolie ruled the airwaves with black humour and an arsenal of some of the worst movies ever made.

With easygoing and friendly prose, local broadcast historians Ted Okuda and Mark Yurkiw kick things off with a profile of hipster beatnik Marvin (Terry Bennet), who held court on 1957's *Shock Theatre*, "dismembering" and torturing his assistant Dear (played by his real-life wife Joy). Though Bennet passed away in the late '70s, there are plenty of memories here from those who worked on the show; they reveal that *Shock Theatre* proved so popular that it was eventually extended to feature a post-movie "Shocktail Party" with a live band and a handful of other weird characters.

After a series of host-less shows, Jerry G. Bishop's hippie-fied Svengoolie (and his successor, Rich Koz's Son of Svengoolie) rose to become Chicago's best-known characters, and they make up the bulk of the book. More than just a rundown of these hosts' rubber chicken-flinging, TV-spoofing schtick, *Chicago TV Horror Movie Shows* offers interesting profiles of the personalities behind the pancake makeup, and puts both Svengoolies in perspective with the city's legacy of local television, as well as the national horror host phenomenon in general.

Aside from some unnecessary appendices, *Chicago TV Horror Movie Shows* is a must for any Chi-towners who grew up glued to the flickering Philco for a taste of Marvin or Svengoolie's screwy antics. All horror fans, however, will appreciate the fact that Okuda and Yurkiw have put together a well-researched effort full of great photos and behind-the-scenes stories that really captures the flavour of the local scene.

Paul Corupe

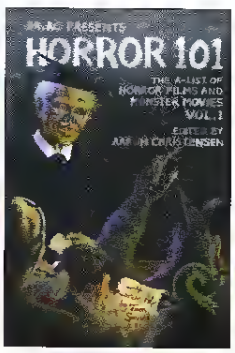


Tales from the Cult Film Trenches

Louis Paul
McFarland

A book featuring interviews with such stars as Tom Atkins, John Saxon and Linnea Quigley, as well as 33 other actors from the horror, sci-fi and exploitation genres should be a treat, but somehow Louis Paul misses the mark with this 336-page volume.

Contrary to what the title suggests, readers are barely given a glimpse into the proverbial "trenches" of cult filmmaking. This is due, in part, to Paul's decision to cover *Cult Film Trenches*' subject matter solely through the use of dated interviews that spotlight actors who have long passed their prime (including Dee Wallace Stone, David Carradine and Valerie Leon). To be fair, his subjects *do* discuss their performances, but only briefly touch on the stresses of being involved with low-budget, ultra-fast productions. Unfortunately, since most of these stories have been well-documented in various magazines, there's little new insight here. And while it is encouraging to see Fred Williamson (*From Dusk Till Dawn*) and Austin Stoker (*Assault on Precinct 13*) finally getting some attention, Paul's interviewing technique can be frustrating. When asking questions, he has the tendency to lead his subjects, practically making them give him the answers he wants.



In addition to the interviews, photos are scattered throughout the book, and include many from Paul's personal collection. In the case of lesser-known talents, these allow readers the opportunity to match faces with names and vice versa, however, like the interviews, these too are mostly dated.

Despite *Tales from the Cult Film Trenches*' very apparent flaws, a couple interviews do stand out, most notably one in which a gentlemanly Christopher Lee shares his thoughts on his career, and another where Don Stroud *(The Amityville Horror)* regales readers with stories of drug abuse, working at the legendary Whisky A Go-Go and meeting serial robber Jack Murphy.

The concept here might be solid, but Paul completely fumbles the execution.

W. Brice McVicar



The Grim Reader

DEVILISH GREETINGS: VINTAGE DEVIL POSTCARDS

Monte Beauchamp, ed.
Fantagraphics



This demented and entertaining batch of postcards from the days of olde run the gamut from Halloween greeting cards to playful images of smiling sinners burning alive. Assembled by award-winning art director Monte Beauchamp, this handsome collection is recommended for anyone interested in vintage illustration and pop art. The Devil made me do it!

Justin Erickson

THE NUMBER 121 TO PENNSYLVANIA & OTHERS

Kealan Patrick Burke
Cemetery Dance



Burke's latest offering stitches together thirteen short stories (and a screenplay) dealing with violent car crashes, deformed teenage girls, ghosts of unborn children, self-decapitations and a mysterious giant beanstalk. Each tale grabs you within the first few sentences and never lets go, resulting in a collection guaranteed to take you on one of the scariest rides of your life.

Last Chance Lance

THE UNION OF HOPE AND SADNESS: THE ART OF GAIL POTOCKI

Thomas Negovan
Olympian



This amazingly detailed art book examines more than 100 of Gail Potocki's paintings, including her haunting portrait of fellow artist Joe Coleman dissecting his own heart. Ranging from the sublime to the surreal, her symbolist works are fraught with death, loneliness and despair (especially for the environment), yet she still manages to gracefully project a message of hope amidst all the suffering.

Last Chance Lance

GOD LAUGHS WHEN YOU DIE

Michael Boatman
Dybbuk



Ex-*Spin City* actor Michael Boatman tries to join the dark side through his first collection of horror shorts, with mixed results. Imaginative, if not a little too fantastic to actually be scary, Boatman shows potential, but his go-to weapon of the cheeky analogy tires quickly and feels forced within deviant storylines that require a suspension of disbelief far beyond my own personal threshold.

Trevor Tuminski



Dr. A.C. Presents Horror 101: *A respectable starting point for novice horror movie fans.*

Dr. A.C. presents Horror 101

Aaron Christensen, ed.
Midnight Marquee Press

The back jacket of *Horror 101* advertises "110 films covered in 101 essays by 78 horror fans from 12 countries," compiled by Chicago genre scribe Aaron Christensen (horror101withdrac.com). The "horror fans" part is certainly true and it's my only serious caveat here, as only a handful of these contributors are professional writers, film scholars or filmmakers, and it frequently shows. Still, even if there are comparatively few revelations lurking herein for serious horror fans, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend the book as a primer for the uninitiated. And let's face it: at some point, that was all of us, which is important to remember as we find ourselves called upon for advice by the less horror-encyclopedic. Which films are compulsory? Which may be of further interest? Which should be avoided like a Linkin Park fan with chlamydia? Sure, we all enjoy running our mouths off about our beloved genre, but sometimes we have better things to do – like watching more horror movies – which is why *Horror 101* might be just the right gift for the budding horror fan in your life.

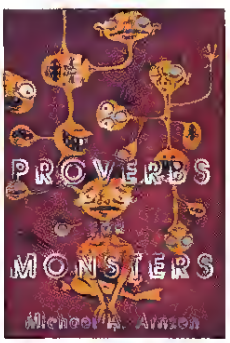
The must-sees are sufficiently covered here, from the silents (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, *The Phantom of the Opera*) and early Universal creature features (*Frankenstein* and friends) through '50s American sci-fi (*Them!*) and Hitchcock to latter-day classics from the '70s and early '80s (*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Halloween* and sundry slashers). Although plenty of cultish titles are examined (*Eraserhead*, *The Beyond*, *Phantasm*), more recent fare is given shorter shrift, with coverage of only the biggest hits (*Scream*, *The Blair Witch Project*, various M. Night Shyamalan efforts). I mean, come on, at least some of these people must have seen *May* or *Session 9*. Still, even while the analysis is occasionally shallow, there's very little here I would actually disagree with, and the love and respect these folks have for the genre is beyond question. All this, and an intro by Tom Savini – what's not to like?

John W. Bowen

proverbs for monsters

Michael A. Arnzen
Dark Regions Press

With its cartoonish cover, you'd be forgiven if you thought *Proverbs for Monsters* belonged at the bottom of your eight-year-old brother's toy box. Crack the binding though, and within the first few pages you'll realize that this anthology of deliciously bizarre short stories and warped poems would likely scare the little pissant right into puberty.



Award-winning author Michael A. Arnzen knows how to spin an original, terrifying bedtime story. At his best, his imaginative style makes him an entertaining guide, capable of clever wordplay that really leaves teethmarks. It's clear his writing picks up steam when he takes a few pages to flesh out his fables, waxing inventively about a boy whose Halloween mask becomes his face ("The Boblin"), an attention-starved woman who's slowly fading away ("Immaterial Girl"), a cell-splicing dentist who's created a monster with a million-dollar smile ("Mr.

Mouth") and the scariest amusement park ever created ("Exorcystland"). But when he diverges into the tighter confines of flash fiction, as in "People Repellent," "Imaginary Trivia" and "You're Not Getting Sleepy," the words fall flat and barely draw blood. At his worst, treading the experimental territory of "Dead Lantern" or the vexatiously clunky "Fluid Mosaic," his bite simply leaves no mark.

Pitched as somewhat of a greatest hits retrospective for readers new to Arnzen, *Proverbs for Monsters* is definitely more hit than miss, but the smattering of poetry meant to coda the book is a confusing finish. Often bordering on juvenile, despite the graphic subject matter, it's not sweet or humorous enough to be in the same category as Tim Burton's *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy* and not gutsy enough to really resonate the way good horror should. Ending the book in such a poetry purgatory only serves to highlight the inconsistency. This is one collection destined to divide both newcomers and avid followers alike.

Trevor Tuminski

Road from Hell

Gerard Houarner
Necro Publications



One of the most underrated authors working in the genre today, Gerard Houarner blends beauty with violence on every page of his latest novel *Road From Hell*. Houarner, whose style is heavier than a waterlogged corpse, weaves a wicked tale featuring his trademark floating nightclub, Painfreak, contract killer Max, the great god Kali, zombies and lots of anguish.

The third entry in the "Max" series – known for the violent and sadistic exploits of its aforementioned hitman, his mercenary friend Lee and his twin lovers Kueur and Alioune – *Road From Hell* picks up exactly where *Road to Hell* ended. Max is dead and biding his time in Hell, where he's separated from the Beast, a savage entity that resides within him and lives only to satisfy its craving for mutilation, murder and death. Meanwhile, Max's son Angel and his other companions are left wandering a desert that rests on the plane between life and death. From there, they plan to invade Hell and rescue Max, but not before they join ranks with a caravan of the dead who have their own sinister plan – one that will bring forth the Apocalypse if it succeeds.

Where Houarner's talent truly shines is in his ability to dissect human relationships. His focus on the pain and suffering one can experience simply by caring for someone easily outweighs his superb knack for describing the physical pain his characters either suffer or inflict.

Necro's edition of *Road From Hell* features a few cool extras, including an introduction by the author that gives readers a quick recap of Max's trials and tribulations in both *The Beast That Was Max* and *Road to Hell*. Considering it's been about four years since the last book in the series, these pages serve as a great reminder as to where Max has been and how he ended up in Hell. Plus, the book closes with a bonus short story, "Like Smoke Rising from the Burning Ghats," in which Max is given more of a back story.

All in all, *Road From Hell* is a trip worth taking. And the roadkill you find along the way will have you slowing down for a closer look at the carnage.

W. Brice McVicar



Haunted America

Michael Norman and Beth Scott
TOR

Haunted Heritage

Michael Norman and Beth Scott
TOR

Torrid tales of murder and madness abound in these two volumes of the Haunted America series, both recently released in paperback. *Haunted America* (the first of four collections of ghost stories from across the continent) was originally published in 1994 and is the strongest of the bunch. Conversely, *Haunted Heritage* (the last) is a bit of a disappointment if you've read any of the others, since it consists of tales that presumably weren't strong enough to make it into the earlier collections, and also contains a good deal of reprinted material.



Haunted America is an eclectic, rambling book, which makes it better for dipping into than for reading straight through. It suffers from the same peculiar organization that the other volumes in the series do: the stories are arranged geographically rather than by theme, which can be a little frustrating as there's no clear sense of progression in the book's structure. That said, there are some cracking yarns in this one: the tale of Bloody Polly, who beheaded her sister and allowed three slaves to be executed for the crime in 19th-century Kentucky, is as gruesome as it is chilling; and the legend of the Devil's Mansion in New Orleans is a dramatic and gory fable. There are also a number of contemporary anecdotes in here, including the *Amityville Horror*-like account of one Wisconsin family's repeated run-ins with an apparently evil entity in the small town of Horicon.



These are all reproduced in *Haunted Heritage*, a book that's even looser in structure, and padded with new stories that have a hint of rigor mortis about them that has nothing to do with their phantom subjects.

Haunted America is an entertaining tour of a continent's spooks, and manages to maintain a fine balance between the stuff of pure legend and eyewitness accounts. Overall, however, the series' exhaustive coverage is undercut by its lack of discrimination, so read the first one and leave it at that.

Justine Warwick

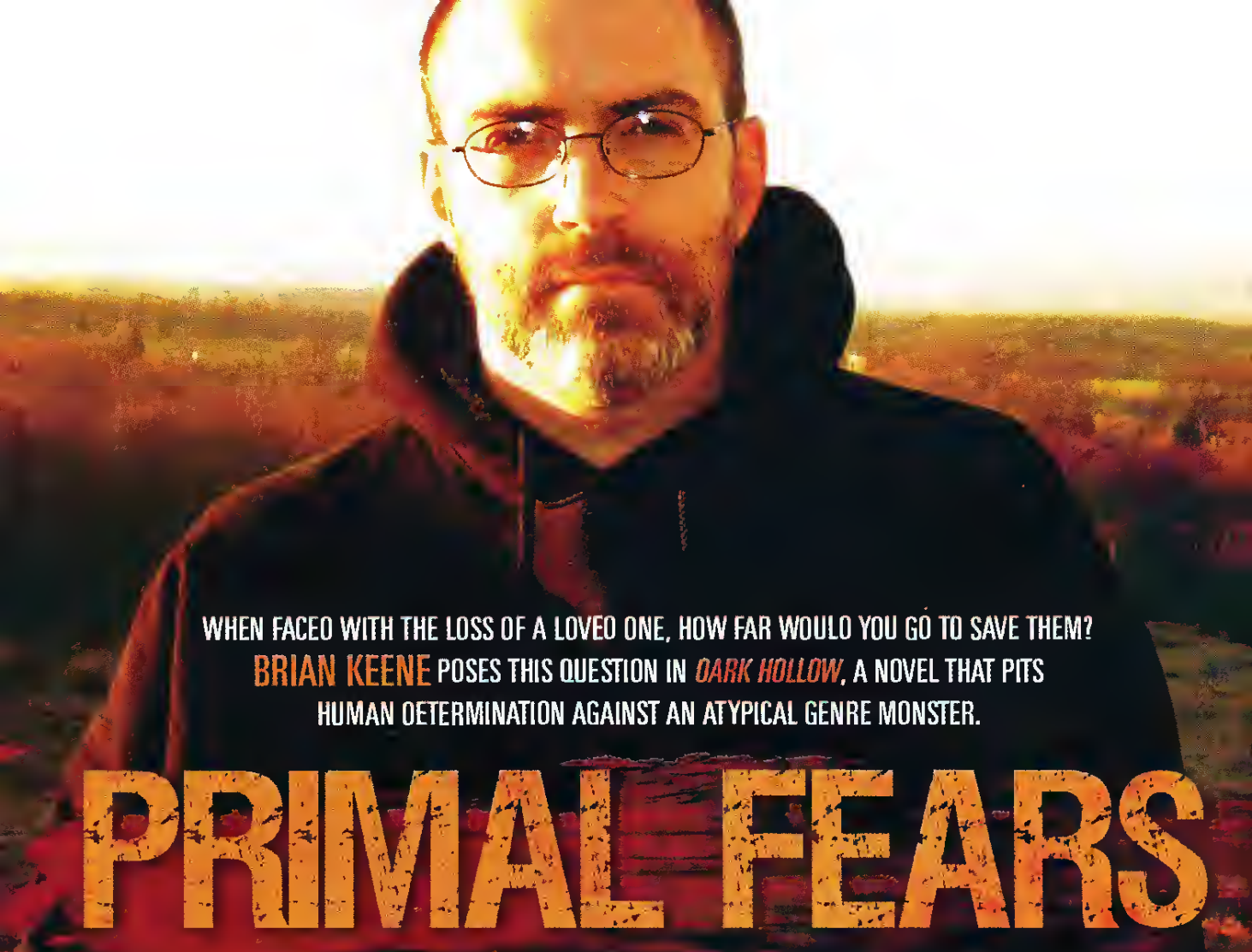


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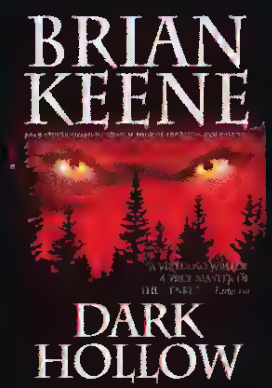
WHEN FACED WITH THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE, HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO TO SAVE THEM? BRIAN KEENE POSES THIS QUESTION IN *DARK HOLLOW*, A NOVEL THAT PITS HUMAN DETERMINATION AGAINST AN ATYPICAL GENRE MONSTER.

PRIMAL FEARS

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER

Brian Keene is not just "that zombie guy." Sure, he wrote *The Rising*, one of the most successful zombie novels of the last decade, one that helped kick-start the undead revival, but in the years since that book's 2003 release, Keene's proven himself a versatile talent in more corners of the genre than simply those that house the corpses of lumbering dead.

"The most obvious result [of *The Rising*'s success] is that I'm no longer ducking creditors," says Keene, with a laugh. "No, seriously, I've seen people credit *The Rising*, *28 Days Later* and *The Walking Dead* with re-energizing the long-dormant zombie mania. I don't know if that's true or not, but if so, as a fan myself, I'm honoured. What I do know is that its success introduced me to a pretty sizeable readership, most of whom were willing to take a chance on my non-zombie fare."



In the last five years, the Pennsylvania-based author has penned two more zombie books, *City of the Dead* (a sequel to *The Rising*) and *Dead Sea*, as well as a supernatural thriller about a trio of white-trash bank robbers (*Terminal*), an end-of-the-world novel featuring giant man-eating worms (*The Conqueror Worms*) and another about a graveyard ghoul (*Ghoul*). He's also released three collections of "rants" and is set to edit volumes two and three of the *New Dark Voices* anthology series for Delirium Books, easily making him one of the most prolific writers working in horror fiction today.

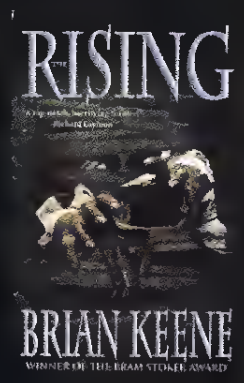
That said, it may surprise some to learn how intensely personal Keene's work can be, or how much of it is informed by the author's own real-life struggles. His Stoker Award-winning first novel, *The Rising*, quickly eclipsed less sincere zombie fare because of Keene's decision to filter the zombie apocalypse scenario through the eyes of a father who has been separated from his young son. As a result, the story concerns itself as much with the undead uprising as it does the incredible lengths that a parent will go to save a child.

"The zombies were just window dressing – you could have taken out the zombies and replaced them with werewolves or Cthulhu or any other monster and the book would

DARK HOLLOW IS SORT OF A CONTINUATION OF [*THE RISING*'S] THEME.
BRIAN KEENE

have still worked," affirms Keene. "The number one piece of advice writers are given is to 'write what you know.' So that's what I do. Any work of fiction is only as good as its characters. If you want your reader to care about the book, they first have to care about the people in the book. My real-life triumphs and tragedies are no different than any other person's. If I use them to inform my fiction on some level, then hopefully, somebody else will empathize or identify with the situation."

Dark Hollow, out now from Leisure Books as a mass-market paperback, mines similarly uncomfortable interpersonal terrain to deliver its one-two punch of suspense and horror. The book, which was previously released in 2006 by Bloodletting Press as a very limited special edition hardcover (only 426 copies exist) under its original title *The Rutting Season*, concerns a rash of suspicious kidnappings plaguing an otherwise peaceful small Pennsylvanian town. Women are vanishing, and as the tight-knit community worries and speculates, mid-list mystery author Adam Senft struggles to come to terms with yet more tragedy – a flagging marriage and his wife's inability to carry a child to term. When Adam and his friends discover that a satyr – a lascivious mythological half-goat, half-man creature – is responsible for the abductions, and successfully foil his first attempt to take their wives, they find themselves forced to delve deep into the occult and an unsavory murder to try to save their loved ones.



"*Dark Hollow* is sort of a continuation of [*The Rising*'s] theme," explains Keene, who chose the satyr as the book's villain partially because it's so underused in horror. "It deals with what happens when a parent – particularly a father – can't save his loved ones, despite his best efforts. As men, most of us are genetically programmed to protect our families. The guilt and depression and anger that results when we fail at this task feeds directly into that primal responsibility. We no longer feel worthy of our loved ones. The book's antagonist, the satyr, embodies these emotions. He's the ultimate male symbol, and he's succeeding in places where the novel's protagonist has failed."

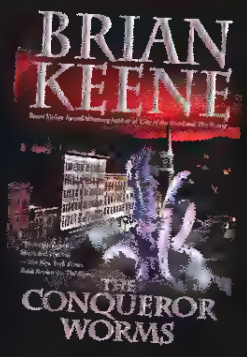
While Keene confesses that this was a difficult book to write, he also jokes that writing is "cheaper than therapy." In fact, he goes on to explain that not only did he feel a great attachment to the main character in *Dark Hollow* – Keene himself was dealing with a personal tragedy at the time of the book's writing – but that it's the first thing he's written that hasn't made him cringe afterward. Yet, one wonders if he ever worries about putting too much of himself into his horror stories.

"All the time," he admits, even though he's relatively open about his private life in his blog (found at hailsaten.blogspot.com). "And there are more things that I haven't channelled into fiction than I have. I've got a responsibility to the reader. I want to create realisbc characters that everyone can identity with. I want to entertain them, and make them say, 'Hey, I've been there/felt like that/thought that way.' But I also have a responsibility to my family, friends and loved ones, and I've learned over the years that not everything is fodder for the muse."

Fans of Keene's other works can expect to stumble across a couple "easter eggs" while reading *Dark Hollow*, in the form of characters from other stories who make brief cameos in the new book

"The novel takes place in the same region as *Ghoul*, *Terminal* and *Kill Whitley*, as well as a short story from *Fear of Gravity*, so it's only natural that characters would crossover," explains Keene, whose underlying "Labyrinth" mythology links many of the author's works and provides some insight into the otherworldly origins of his monsters. "Events in one have subtle impact on events in another. The key word there is subtle. You don't have to read one to understand another. In fact, the casual reader probably won't even pick up on the connections."

Fans can also look forward to another couple of prolific years for Keene, who's currently working on a pair of novels for Leisure. The first is *Castaways* (due out in February 2009), which he describes as a tribute to horror author Richard Laymon. The second is *Urban Gothic* (October 2009), a tribute to the extreme horror fiction of Edward Lee and the movie *C.H.U.D.* In addition, he's penning a short story collection titled *Unhappy Endings* (out later this year from Delirium) and a novella for Cemetery Dance called *Scratch*. Keene, however, insists there's no secret to his copious output of new work.



"I'm lucky enough to earn a living from my writing," he says, "which means I get to write full-time, rather than punching a time clock at a factory the way I used to do. I've got the luxury of eight or nine hours a day to write, and I don't squander it. I sit my ass down in the chair at seven in the morning and I work until five in the afternoon. I treat it just like I would any other job. When I worked in a foundry, I was expected to make a certain number of castings by the end of the day. Now, I expect myself to have written a certain number of words by the end of the day."

And in case you're wondering, success hasn't changed the author one bit.

"I'm still a fan-boy, and I always will be," confesses Keene. "I still run to the store when a new [Stephen] King or [Jack] Ketchum novel comes out. I still obsess over comic books and movies. I still freak out like a little kid when there's a message from Ken Foree on the answering machine or from [Anthrax guitarist] Scott Ian on MySpace. But then my wife brings me back to earth by making me take out the trash or pick up the dog shit in the yard."



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WARNING!

TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

The World Famous Frankenstein 1818 Pub
Edinburgh, Scotland
by James Burrell

Edinburgh is a city that feels frozen in another era. Medieval castles that rest on hills of volcanic rock, ancient churches and winding cobblestone streets give Scotland's capital a beautiful, mythical atmosphere perfectly befitting a gothic horror novel. The birthplace of Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Edinburgh draws in more than 13 million visitors a year and is currently the second most popular UK destination for tourists, right after London. In addition to the plethora of local witch and ghost tours offered, horror fans may find Edinburgh particularly appealing as it is home to The World Famous Frankenstein 1818 pub.

Opening in July of 2000 at a cost of nearly £3 million (roughly $6 million USD), the pub, located in the heart of the city's Old Town, is a sprawling three-floor complex (part bar and restaurant, part museum and part club) capable of accommodating just under 700 patrons at once. Not quite a traditional pub, this is a themed bar and restaurant that will surely delight horror fans, and anyone else with a fondness for the famous fiend.



As I walk through the doors of the main floor I'm awestruck by the decor of the establishment. Various mechanical gadgets and electrodes right out of Baron Frankenstein's laboratory greet me as I make my way around to the many walls, booths, corners and seating areas to examine what is easily the most incredible collection of *Frankenstein*-related memorabilia under one roof. Rare, vintage Universal and Hammer movie posters, statues, props, original artwork, cinema lobby cards and production stills, as well as autographs of screen legends Boris Karloff, Elsa Lanchester (in her classic *Bride of Frankenstein* makeup), Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing gracefully adorn every nook and cranny of the pub. A beautifully detailed, nearly two-foot tall, bronze statue of Karloff as the monster – gleaming from a counter behind the bar – also catches my eye.

I head to the basement, stopping on the staircase to read brief passages from the original Mary Shelley novel, inscribed (and designed to give the appearance of handwritten entries made in a journal) in large writing on the walls.

At the bottom of the stairs further terrifying treasures await. A massive portrait (almost like a large oil painting) of Boris Karloff, sans makeup, hangs prominently on one of the walls. My next discovery brings a smile to my face: a Peter Cushing-themed party room. For birthdays or other special occasions you can blow out candles while surrounded by vintage Cushing Hammer stills and lobby cards from one of his best films, *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed!* – all stunningly mounted on blood-red walls. Of exceptional interest is an autographed black and white 8x10 still of Cushing, hanging at the entrance of the room, perfectly capturing the cool and elegant menace of his Baron Frankenstein.

My tour finishes with a journey to the top floor, which resembles the tower of Frankenstein's laboratory, complete with seating that overlooks the main floor's large wooden antique-style bar (it looks as if could have been taken directly from a village inn in Bavaria).

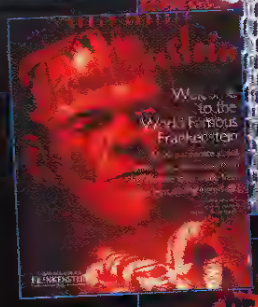
The Frankenstein pub was, in a past life, the Elim Pentecostal Church. The structure, said to be more than 200-years-old, retains much of the original church architecture. The pulpit where a priest once gave his Sunday sermon still stands but is now used by the pub's resident DJ, who plays music ranging from current hits to old school classics, as well as the occasional horror-themed tune. Ray Parker Jr.'s "Ghostbusters" and Michael Jackson's "Thriller" played to thunderous applause during my visit.

Although the building's features – including a high cathedral-like ceiling and arched windows – add an authentic gothic feel to the pub's environment, the move to retain them was out of necessity rather than aesthetics. As with the majority of structures in Edinburgh's Old Town, the edifice is considered historical and is on UNESCO's list of designated World Heritage Sites. (In order to preserve the historical character of Edinburgh, establishments are prohibited by law from altering certain architectural components of residing buildings. Even adding a flagpole or an oversized sign to a business' outdoor facade has to be approved by the city council's planning authority).

After spending nearly an hour admiring my evocative surroundings – which remind me of how much fun old monster movies were – I finally sit down to eat. I choose a centrally located booth right below some Frankenstein-inspired stained glass windows. The 1931 Universal *Frankenstein* plays on several giant screens as I order from the extensive (and gorgeously designed) Monster Bite Menu, which includes dishes such as Doctor Frankenstein's Tower, Frankenstyle Monster Ribs, a selection of Shelley's Sandwiches, Franky's Monster Fajitas, Franky's Famous Monster Burger, Chili Cauldrons and, as

The monstrous menu warns, a variety of terrifyingly tempting desserts. For a unique touch, shots are even served in test tubes. And for those who want to sample the local cuisine, traditional Scottish dishes, including haggis (chopped lamb innards and spices baked in a sheep's stomach), are also offered. My bill was a respectable £12.35 (about $25.00 USD) which isn't too bad by UK standards.

After my meal I am told about various events the pub puts on each week. Rocky Horror Night and the Full Moon Show feature staff members who dress up as characters from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and other monster movies, respectively, dance on the bar and act out scenes from the films. There's also a Quiz Night where teams of up to five can pit their brains and knowledge of monster trivia against each other to win prizes. Unleash the Beast is a game show-inspired event in which patrons have a chance to win money if they can unlock Frankie from his cage. Sunday night karaoke in the beer cellar rounds out the week's events. (Surprisingly, this is just one of three Frankenstein pubs located in Scotland; the others are in Aberdeen and Glasgow, though they are not as large or as elaborately decorated as this one.)



And just when I think I have seen everything, I have the ghastly pleasure of witnessing the pub's namesake make an appearance. From the ceiling directly above the bar, a large laboratory table, with an animatronic Frankenstein Monster chained to it, descends. The table stops several feet from the floor and our fearsome friend sits up on his slab, looks around at the startled and amused patrons before he's raised back into the rafters. All this is accompanied by sinister music, "thunder," "lightning" and "electricity" in the form of an impressive light and sound effects display. Mary Shelley would be proud.

Frankenstein Pub is located at 26 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh and is open seven days a week from 11 a.m. to 1 a.m. Monday to Friday and 10 a.m. to 1 a.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Visit frankenstein-pub.co.uk for more info.







Monster Chiller Dinner Theatre: *(clockwise from top left) Playing a game of Unleash the Beast, the elaborately decorated bar, stained glass film posters above a booth, and (inset) one of the pub's two menus; (opposite) the main entrance and an animatronic Frankenstein's monster.*

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THE GORE-MET MENU

The Gore-met noshes on the ultimate Naschy flick.

HORROR RISES FROM THE TOMB (1972)

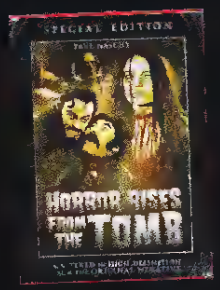
Starring Paul Naschy, Vic Winner and Helga Liné
Directed by Carlos Aured
Written by Jacinto Molina
Deimos Entertainment



Paul Naschy

One film epitomizes the career of Spanish horror legend Paul Naschy (a.k.a. Jacinto Molina): the consummate Euroshocker *Horror Rises From the Tomb* (*El espanto surge de la tumba*).

The pre-credit sequence is a scenario Molina would later rework for *Curse of the Devil* (1973) and *Night of the Werewolf* (1981). In mid-15th-century France, nobleman Alaric de Mamac (Naschy) and his consort Mabille De Lancré (Helga Liné) are to be executed for blasphemous crimes. De Mamac vows to return from the grave, though, spitting a curse upon the descendants of their accusers (Naschy in the second of three roles and Vic Winner in the first of two) before he is beheaded and De Lancré stripped, hung upside down and tortured.



Five hundred years later in Paris, Hugo de Mamac (Naschy again), artist friend Maurice Roland (Winner again) and their respective girlfriends, Sylvia (Betsabé Ruiz) and Paula (Cristina Suriani), attend a seance as a lark. In an effort to debunk the proceedings, Hugo asks the medium to contact his infamous ancestor. Alaric's disembodied head appears to deliver the precise locations of his noggin and cadaver, which had been buried separately on the Mamac family lands.

Hugo is skeptical and suggests they visit the remote estate and search the ruins of a monastery to remove any doubt that the seance was a hoax. While driving through the mountains, they're attacked by bandits and their car gets wrecked. Local vigilantes appear and kill the bandits, shooting one in the face and hanging the other from a tree. Hugo negotiates for another car and they complete their journey.

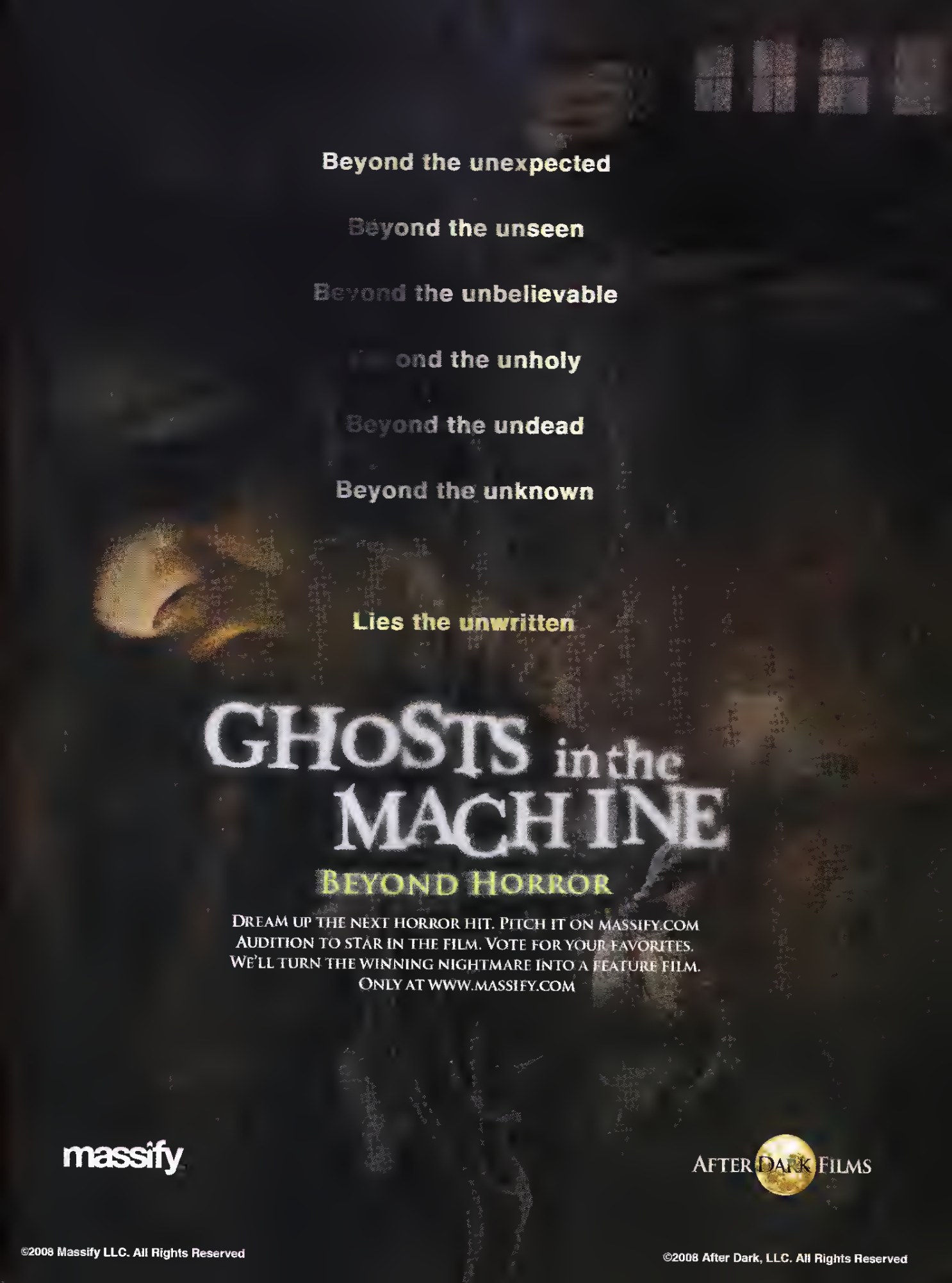
Upon arrival they are met by the caretaker, Gaston, and his two daughters. Although Gaston warns against visiting the ruins, Hugo directs him to hire a couple of villagers to aid in their adventure. They dig up a chest but are unable to open it. The workmen return at night with a blowtorch to steal the treasure they believe is inside, but instead unleash the long-dormant spirit of de Marnac. The warlock is soon re-headed, with De Lancré at his side, dining on fresh human hearts while commanding a gaggle of mesmerized cast members to do his evil bidding.

Molina's unconventional script incorporates witchcraft, curses, ghosts, vampires, zombies and gore – heads are lopped off, throats are slashed and hearts are cut out and eaten. The female characters are strong and dynamic and the protagonists morally ambiguous. There is no clear-cut hero, as the focus of the film seemingly shifts to different characters throughout. These are just some of the elements that establish *Horror Rises From the Tomb* as classic Eurohorror.

In addition, there's plenty of eroticism, as ample flesh is on display, with the principal female cast members appearing in various states of undress from lingerie to full nudity. Naschy, as Hugo, gets his kit off for a tender softcore sex scene, while as Alaric, he keeps his clothes on for a scene in which he fondles and kisses a fresh corpse.

The violence is appropriately shocking and the gore crude but effective, best exhibited in the brutal vigilante scene; however, sex and gore are not what make these films so appealing. Rather it's their atmosphere and authenticity, the natural result of their locations. Europe is coated in the dust of millennia of human hope, suffering and endeavour. The psychic imprint this has left on the grand architecture, crumbling ruins and cavernous tombs that are the backdrops make for lush visuals that simply could not be duplicated in a Hollywood back lot. In *Horror Rises From the Tomb*, this gothic atmosphere is on full display.

Not surprisingly, the movie has been the most widely available Naschy title in North America, often appearing in various states on VHS. Deimos' new disc features a stunning anamorphic, high-definition transfer from the original negatives with English and Spanish-language options and an introduction by Naschy, who is also featured in a subtitled commentary with director Carlos Aured (who passed away on Feb. 3 at the age of 71). Also included are alternate "clothed" scenes, the Spanish credit sequence, US trailer, stills galleries and liner notes by naschy.com webmaster Mirek Lipinski. It's the definitive release of a classic and the perfect addition to your Naschy library, which of course you've already started.



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SALES FROM THE CRYPT













AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY KEITH CARMAN, TOMB DRAGOMIR, MARK R. HASAN, AARON VON LUPTON AND TREVOR TUMINSKI



LA MORTE HA FATTO L'UOVO **Soundtrack**

Bruno Maderna

FINE DE SIECLE MEDIA

Easily dismissed as a deranged, gratingly inappropnate and dramatically unsupportive score (which, uh, isn't wholly inarguable if you loathe experiments in atonal, aleatorical, and improvised modern writing), Bruno Maderna's last of five film scores for this bonkers giallo entry known as *Death Laid an Egg* finally arrives on CD. Maderna's primary instruments include Spanish-jazz guitar, piano and sparse strings, yet nothing follows the rules. "Down Down Down," for example, sounds like a headless chicken trampling a corner pocket of piano keys, while Maderna scores a love scene with the film's blendered samba theme using a trio of guitar, rustic violin and outbursts from a male vocalist. Complete with eleven bonus tracks, this one's either a daring experiment in modernism or a score in need of a straitjacket. **MRH** ☠☠☠☠



THE OTHER SIDE **Soundtrack**

Kristopher Carter

FILMMUSICDOWNLOADS.COM

To add a bit of gloss to this low-budget shocker about an escapee from Hell hunted by Satan's bounty hunters, Kristopher Carter opted for a large veneer, drawing from a wide array of orchestral samples and electronic sounds. The synthetic score, available as a net release from new label Film Music Downloads, oddly recalls James Horner's spartan and sometimes imitative early scores, with action and assault cues that feature familiar embellishments and melodic phrases you'll swear you've heard before. The opening cue, for example, is a nod to Homer's work on *Aliens*, referencing Khachaturian's "Gayanne Ballet Suite." While that's not a bad thing – Carter's orchestrations are sharp and to the point – the album's strongest material comes from the subtle, unadorned introspective cues, which are few and far between. **MRH** ☠☠1/2

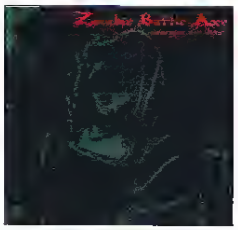


HALLOWEEN III: SEASON OF THE WITCH **Soundtrack**

John Carpenter and Alan Howarth

AHI RECORDS/BUYSOUNDTRAX

The idiot cousin of the rest of the *Halloween* films has, ironically, the most thematically diverse score in the series, largely because it was designed to launch a themed franchise in place of straighttorward sequels. Unshackled from the minimalist *Halloween* themes, John Carpenter and Alan Howarth were free to explore their vintage synth gear and create many rhythmically charged cues, including "First Chase," which contains the score's most addictive blend of pulses, bass hits and silky synth drones. Scored before *Christine*, it's also the next-to-last time the composers would use their primordial synthesizers before switching to funkier, flashier, pop-styled writing. This limited CD includes 32 minutes of unreleased cues, but most will find the new material sounds like thinner alternate versions, and the album's engineering oddly lacks the soothing bass of the old Varese disc. **MRH** ☠☠☠ 1/2



ZOMBIE BATTLE AXE **Electronic**

...Now You are Dead

SLUTFACTORY RECORDS

With a name like Zombie Battle Axe, it's hard to know just what to expect from this band, and as it turns out, that's just what you'll get a lot of confusion. The album opens with a slow, distorted organ melody complemented by periodic wolf howls right out of a Universal monster movie. It sets a spooky and atmospheric tone but becomes fairly tiresome by about the six-minute mark. Worse is the rest of the EP, as the songs are virtually indistinguishable, each relying on the same distorted organ sound and nearly the exact same rhythm, with the only difference coming from the various background effects, whether they be running water or stormy weather – it's like a particularly sinister nature relaxation tape. Curiously, the album is being promoted as a soundtrack to some never-made zombie film, even though it sounds absolutely nothing like the great Romero/Fulci epics, or any other score for that matter. If it did, we'd suggest shutting the movie off before becoming one of the somnambulant dead yourself. **AVL** ☠ 1/2



THE SCARED STIFFS **Punk**

The Last Horror Movie

POPTOWN

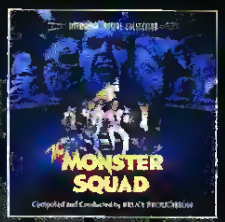
From the graveyards and gutters of New York City, The Scared Stiffs offer a toxic dose of classic Alice Cooper, AC/DC, and '70s punk in a sleazy horror rock concoction. The

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Bruce Broughton

INTRADA SPECIAL COLLECTION



Just as Fred Dekker and Shane Black's script paid tribute to the conventions of classic Universal monster movies, the expansive orchestral score by Bruce Broughton makes some non-subtle nods to genre composers Hans Salter (*Son of Dracula*) and Frank Skinner (*Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*). Yet, typical of his '80s scores, Broughton uses the might of a large orchestra with exceptional finesse. Intrada's limited edition CD preserves the broad dynamics of the original recording sessions, and percussive rumbles in cuts such as "Lock Me Up!" will knock the family dog off the sofa when piped through a subwoofer. Dopey synth cues for the obligatory music montages are also present but don't disrupt Broughton's orchestral narrative that amazingly nails the awe and terror kids feel when they were captivated by their first horror film, and the nostalgia that's so soothing to us adults.
MRH ☠☠☠☠☠

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Kiss Kiss Kill Kill
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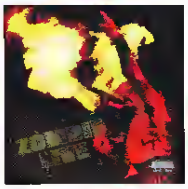
Danish-born, LA-bred hipsters Horrorpops come back for thirds with *Kiss Kiss Kill Kill*, another fright-hearted blend of rockabilly, punk, surf and '60s sugar-pop courtesy of the badass bass of Nekroman (Nekromantix) and velvety voice of sexy singer Patricia Day. On this, their most complete album to date, highlights include "Boot to Boot" (your typical, rebel rousin' call-to-punk-rock-arms) and "Missfit," a skank-tankerous ditty with a great Madness-inspired bridge ("My fist! In the middle of your face!"). The title track drops a fresh web over ground tread in the early '80s by bands like Joy Division and Siouxsie and the Banshees, while brooding ballad "Hitchcock Starlet" slows things down to a creepy crawl with the sounds of distant rolling thunder evoking the cinema noir vibe of the album's classic black and white design. Twelve tales of love and murder most foul, *Kiss Kiss Kill Kill* plants a big wet one on the lips before planting a knife in your freshly broken heart. **TD** ☠☠☠☠☠

attention to detail shown by these ghouls is commendable. From their zombified makeup, to the polished album artwork (embossed cover and plenty of gory stage shots), to song titles such as "There's No Wonder I'm 6 Feet Under" and "Dead Girls Are Easy," The Scared Stiffs creatively tackle the genre from all angles. But while the music has its moments – the Ramonesy rock of "Some Things are Better Left Undead" and the rockabilly twang of "Knoxville Girl," in particular – it never rises far above mediocrity, lacking the energy and attitude to give you that satisfying punch in the gut. Look out for future undertakings by this band, but you can probably skip *The Last Horror Movie*. **AVL** ☠☠1/2



HORROR OF 59 Punk
The Golden Age of Sin
SHARK ATTACK RECORDS

Cleveland-based Horror of 59's sophomore effort boasts one of the more inspired horror punk album covers, a collection of caricaturized icons of fear and perversion, including Vincent Price, Blacula and Betty Page. Like the title suggests, it's an homage to '60s and '70s junk culture, an era when all that sex and gore we take for granted today was actually dangerous and taboo. This same theme is addressed in *The Golden Age of Sin*'s lyrics, but while the concept is cool, the music is not. The album opens with an instrumental intro more than a little reminiscent of AFI's "Fall Children" but quickly descends into a murky series of by-the-numbers garage punk, weak metal and irritating Misfits-inspired tunes. It's anemic efforts like this that keep horror punk from becoming a more interesting genre than it currently is. **AVL** ☠



ZOMBIE Rock
Live
GEFFEN

Though he may paint with broad strokes as a director and push the acceptable number of "yeah"s uttered in a song, it's tough to challenge Rob Zombie's unbridled affection for horror. Dropping his first name from the marquee, Zombie's latest monster is his first live album and a dream set for fans, spanning his entire career as mainstream rock's grizzled soul crusher. Despite some sequenced backing tracks and my sneaking suspicion this may be, partially, one of those instances when a band hit the studio to record their "live" album, the ragged grooves of "Superbeast," "The Devil's Rejects" and "Dragula" are even more colossal in a concert setting. Zombie's coarse growl and John 5's gargantuan guitar feel like a sledgehammer to the belly as the crack band rallies new life into the dirty, dance floor metal of White Zombie's best work. **TT** ☠☠☠ 1/2



CAVALERA CONSPIRACY Metal
Inflikted
ROADRUNNER

Finally reuniting after years of ridiculous familial politics, Sepultura spearheads Max and Igor Cavalera create an album that should have succeeded their former band's seminal 1996 metal effort *Roots*. Resplendent in bottom-heavy verses, borderline-thrash riffing, Igor's syncopated beats and Max's inimitable throaty growl, the desperation and ferocity of *Inflikted* is as musically dominating and brutal as the gory and tormented imagery in the lyrics. Tracks such as "Ultra-Violent," "Must Kill" and "Terrorize" are a complete spin away from Sepultura's trademark political drive, instead championing the beauty of spilled blood and general violence. Delivered with inspired urgency and rage, *Inflikted* is simple yet incredibly effective.
KC ☠☠☠☠☠







RUE MORGUE'S OWN **JAMES FISHER** CRAFTS AN ALBUM OF OTHERWORLDLY MUSIC BASED ON CLIVE BARKER'S *ABARAT* BOOKS.

Aberrant ACOUSTICS

BY JAMES GRAINGER

"Aberrent" means to stray from the right or normal way, and that's just what James Fisher, a Toronto-based musician and visual artist set out to do by creating what he calls a "soundtrack adaptation" of *Abarat*, Clive Barker's twisted fantasy book for teens. Fisher, who's familiar to *Rue Morgue* readers for his Disfigures of Speech illustrations, makes music that invites flattering comparisons to the twisted soundscapes of Mike Patton's (Mr. Bungle, Faith No More, Peeping Tom) more experimental output and the octopus-like sampling and mashing powers of drum-and-bass guru Amon Tobin. But the influence of those and other new music pioneers doesn't explain the circus-like, otherworldly ambience of *Aberrant*.

Complete with recurring chicken noises, its ingenious nods to industriel, goth, jazz, classical and avant-garde forms, is that rare beast: a melding of the musical and literary. Each track is inspired by a scene or sometimes even a sentence from *Abarat*, which tells the story of Candy Quackenbush, a rebellious teen from the Minnesota berg of Chickentown (ergo the chicken noises) who is pulled into an alternate world where each of the 24 hours of the clock plays out for an eternity on its own island. The novel's bizarre concept (which Barker has since expanded in its sequel, *Abarat 2*) and sheer variety of mythical creatures provided the missing link for Fisher to tie together a group of songs that he'd been working on for years.

"I had a bunch of songs in skeletal form but didn't know what to do with them," he explains. "It was like having a whole bunch of delicious ingredients and spices and not knowing what you're going to make with them – casserole, soup, meatloaf?"

At that time Fisher was doing audio work and sound effects for a travelling clown troupe, The Daredevil Opera Company's Cirkus Inferno. He was also collaborating with *Rue Morgue* founder Rodrigo Gudiño on *Nightmare Picture Theatre*, a live multimedia performance piece that incorporated Gudiño's script, scenes from the surreal animated films of the Brothers Quay and Fisher's music.

It was that peculiar combination of projects that dropped Fisher in the parallel universe of Barker's *Abarat*. Fisher was in Winnipeg with Cirkus Inferno almost three years ago when he walked into a toy store and found a copy of the book. Barker had given a very complimentary plug for the soundtrack to *Nightmare Picture Theatre* earlier in the year, and since the author/artist/director was going to be the guest of honour at *Rue Morgue*'s upcoming Festival of Fear, Fisher decided to give the novel a look.

"I wasn't familiar with a lot of Barker's writings but I'd seen his movies and loved [*Hellraiser*'s] Cenobites since I was a kid," he recalls. "Since I knew I was going to meet him at Festival of Fear, I decided to read the book so that I'd have something to talk to him about, besides the nice things he'd said about my album."

After reading an early scene in which Candy Quackenbush opens up a portal between Earth and the world of the Arabat, causing the prairies of Minnesota to be flooded by an mystical ocean, Fisher had his eureka moment.

"I was so moved by that scene that I literally started hearing music and seeing a movie in my head," he explains. "Every chapter presented its own particular form of weirdness and texture that I wanted to work with musically."



When he got back to Toronto, Fisher began layering samples, beats and instrument tracks over that old batch of songs while composing new material directly inspired by the book. The resulting album reflects the novel's dizzying blend of tall-tale storytelling, straight-out horror, slapstick comedy and surreal imagery, with each song creating a corresponding aural mood to a section of the novel. Fisher, who also designed the album packaging, composed, produced and played the music on his arsenal of high-tech keyboards, filled out the tracks with samples, beats, disembodied voices and the odd contribution from his musician friends. Imagine an electronic Wagnerian radio play with the conventional narration and actor's voices removed.

"On one level, the album is my way of reaching out to Clive," Fisher admits. "I'd love to work with him, especially if he ever made a movie out of the books, so I'm looking at the album almost like a business card that says, 'Hey, I'd love to collaborate with you, even if I am a nobody.'"

Aberrant is available through zircocircus.com and myspace.com/fishertunes.

Play Dead

GRAPHICS PLAYABILITY SHIVERS

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



DEMENTIUM: THE WARD

Nintendo DS

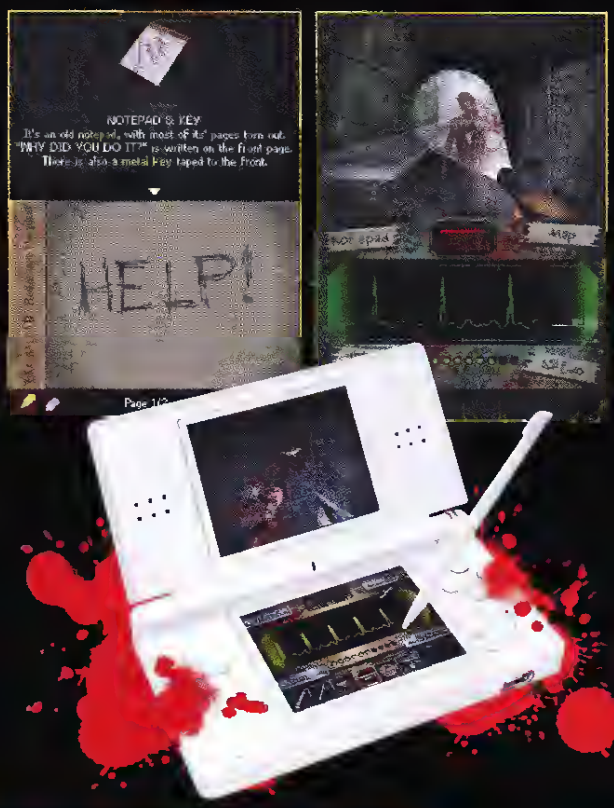
Renegade Kid

Redmoor Hospital would probably be a pretty nice place to convalesce if it wasn't for the fact that it's a decrepit old mental institution filled with aborted medical experiments, slithering abominations and creepy little dead girls.

Your mission is to navigate through sixteen levels of well-rendered, dark, claustrophobic hospital corridors, bloodstained morgues and filthy operating rooms while unravelling the mystery of who you are and how you got there. Lacking the lengthy cut scenes, bloated narrative exposition and futile puzzle solving that plagues most games of this kind, *Dementium* puts you right in the action so you can battle monsters that leap out at you from behind locked doors or drop from ceiling vents -- which, really, is why we play these games anyway.

The mechanics of *Dementium* offer a new gaming dynamic that further sets it apart from most other titles. You can only hold one object, meaning that you can't shoot and shine a flashlight at the same time, making play a little more challenging and a lot more frightening. Despite the hand-held format, this is a genuinely scary title, and you'll want to play with your headphones on to take full advantage of the eerie soundtrack, which is rife with the shrieks of monsters and the moans and sobs of children.

Though it does suffer a bit from an irritating save system and creatures that continually re-spawn, *Dementium* is a very respectable addition to the relatively small Nintendo DS horror gaming library.





HALF-LIFE 2: ZOMBIE PANIC

PC (Mod)

ZPT

If there's one complaint I have about most video games, it's that there are never enough zombies. Problem solved thanks to the *Zombie Panic* developers, who have created a new undead scenario for *Half-Life 2* for the PC. Players can download a free mod at zombiepanic.org that can be used to jump into an online multi-player battle that's fought until the last man -- or zombie -- is left standing.

Playing as either a zombie or a human has advantages and disadvantages; humans can run faster, use weapons and communicate, whereas the shuffling dead can infect humans and just keep coming and coming and coming.

Like most modifications, this one still has some bugs to work out but it's a great gaming experience with a lot of replay value and gore galore. Now, if only they would make a mod so I could play Zombie Mario Kart.



PARASITES UNLEASHED

Card Game

Zygote Games

How cool would life as a parasite be? It sure would be neat to bore into somebody's small intestine or hide in the lungs of a snail until it hacks you up in a glob of yellow mucus.

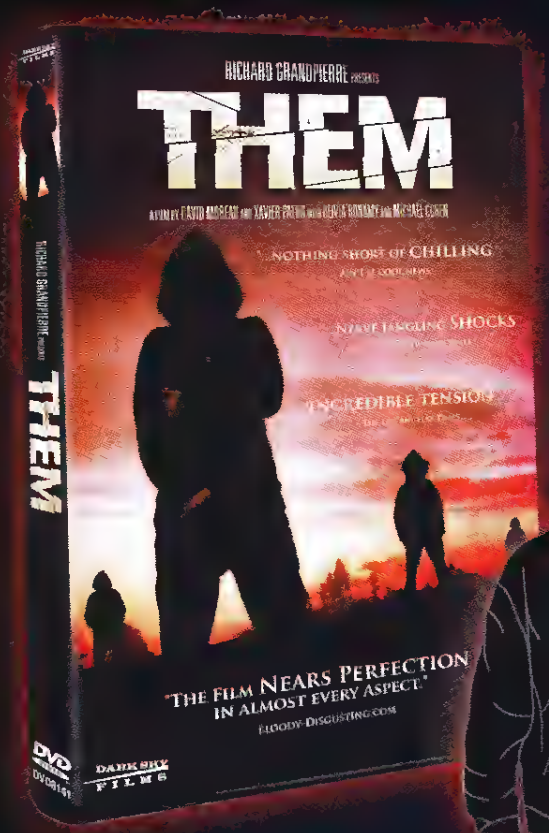
A team of biologists thought up this easy to-play, fast-paced card game for two to four players, who take on the roles of various disgusting parasites aiming to mate and lay eggs before getting expelled or killed off by medicine.

Each game comes with 55 nicely illustrated cards that are loaded with fun facts about different parasites and prove to be as educational as they are entertaining. It only gets scary when you stop to think about all of the nasty things that could be living inside of you.

For even more gross-out appeal, check out the game developers' blog at sciencemadecool.com/weekly_parasite to see their parasite of the week in all of its disgusting microscopic glory.


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Classic Cut Presents

THE SAVAGE PLANET
A.K.A. THE FANTASTIC PLANET



René Laloux and Roland Topor
France/Czechoslovakia – 1973

In the late 1960s, full-length animated features were still very expensive and time-consuming to create; fans of cell animation could gorge on Disney's sugary fairy tales or trip out to The Beatles psychotropic *Yellow Submarine*, but there was little for sci-fi/horror fans. Luckily, a team of French and Czechoslovakian artists (headed up by René Laloux and Roland Topor) were painstakingly animating a film that would startle and fascinate audiences across Europe with its brutal and surreal imagery.

La Planète sauvage (*The Savage Planet*), based on Pierre Pairault's (writing as "Stefan Wul") 1957 novel *Oms En Serie* (*Oms In Series*), took nearly five years to complete. It was hampered by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, which resulted in production being moved to France, where the 72-minute feature was finally released in 1973, winning the Special Jury Prize at Cannes.

The film is set on a world inhabited by a race of giant blue humanoid creatures with web-like ears and bulbous red eyes, called Draags. They share the planet with tiny humans called Oms, (a play on *hommes*, the French word for "man"), who are regarded as vermin by the Draags and are domesticated as pets when they aren't killed for sport or curiosity.

The opening scene sets the tone for this brutal film as a half-naked woman clutching her baby is pursued by Draags, who flick her body back and forth and finally kill her by dropping her from a great height while her baby lies mewling beside her corpse. The film follows the child, Terr, as he is domesticated by a young Draag named Tiva and is brought home where a control collar is placed around his neck and he's forced to fight other domesticated Oms for sport. Years later, he learns the history of the planet by intercepting the lessons that Tiva receives via a headset. He escapes, taking the headset with him, and meets up with a group of wild Oms to impart the knowledge he's gained. The Oms find out that the Draag government has decided to wipe them out, so they build a spaceship in order to flee to a nearby moon. A handful of them escape just as the Draag exterminators arrive, killing those left behind with poison gas, crushing them with huge rolling stones and vacuuming them onto sharpened metal spikes. When the Oms reach the moon, they discover the secret to the Draags' existence and attempt to force a truce.

Laloux directed the film, working with the multi-talented Topor (here as graphic artist), who had risen to fame by teaming up with film director Alejandro Jodorowsky to form the Panic Movement, which specialized in shocking audiences with surreal images. Topor's novel *The Tenant* had been adapted to film by Roman Polanski, and the author was an astonishingly good actor as well, playing Renfield in Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu*. Before *The Savage Planet*, Laloux and Topor had collaborated on several animated shorts, including *Les Temps morts* (*The Dead Times*) and *Les Escargots* (*The Snails*), both of which are still rarely seen outside of Europe.

Topor's animation, hand-drawn with warm pastels and heavy cross-hatching, combined cutout and cell animation which lends the film an eerie, phantasmagorical look with more than a passing resemblance to the nightmares of Hieronymus Bosch and Salvador Dali. Where *The Savage Planet* really succeeds as horror, though, is in its portrayal of the alien culture of the Draags and the other bizarre, repulsive creatures that inhabit the planet, including a monstrosity with branch-like limbs that traps flying creatures and hurls them to their deaths on the ground.

Though the dialogue is sparse, the soundtrack is filled with the jazzy strains of musician Alain Goraguer, who combines trippy guitar riffs with experimental electronic sounds to create an equally alien soundscape.

Released in North America by Roger Corman's New World, the film was retitled *The Fantastic Planet* and quickly became a cult classic. Though both Topor and Laloux have passed away, it survives as a testament to a brilliant collaboration. It defined a cartoonish grotesque horror/sci-fi aesthetic echoed in everything from animated features *Heavy Metal*, Pink Floyd's *The Wall* and Ralph Bakshi's *Fire and Ice*, to the works of anime artists Hayao Miyazaki (*Princess Mononoke*) and Hiroyuki Yamaga (*Wings of Honnemaise*), and the monstrous carnival style of artist Jim Woodring, plus Tarsem Singh's surreal serial killer film *The Cell*.

More than that, though, *The Savage Planet* proved that animated features weren't just for kids, horror and fantasy could go hand-in-hand in the medium and the result could be as politically startling as it was visually shocking.

Last Chance Lance



The Savage Planet: *Defined a cartoonish, grotesque, sci-fi horror aesthetic.*

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